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## Information Release Authorization Form

Thursday, February 18, 2016

- Newspapers (Advertisement/Public Notice/Press Release)
- Radio Stations
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Attached is an Information Release issued by our office (AS-EPA). We would like to ask your assistance in making this information available to the public immediately, via your broadcasts or news publications. For additional information, kindly contact the AS-EPA Director Ameko Pato or Deputy Director Faamao Asalele at 633-2304.

Fa'afetai lava.

- Governor's Office, ASG Weekly
- Director, Department of Public Information (KVZK-TV)
- Samoa News
- Samoa Post
- KHJ FM 93.1 Radio Station
- WVUV FM 103.1 Radio Station
- KSBS FM 92.1 Radio Station
- KNWJ FM 104.7 Radio Station

### Title/Heading:

**“Statement by the American Samoa Environmental Protection Agency  
on Testing of Drinking Water from Vending Machines in American Samoa”**

Approved by:

Ameko Pato, Director  
American Samoa – EPA

Date:

2/18/16



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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**February 18, 2016**

**Statement by the AS-EPA regarding  
Water Testing for Vending Machines in American Samoa**

On February 17, 2016, the Samoa News published an article entitled, “Student exposes the filthy truth about water vending machines,” reported by Blue Chen-Fruean. The article calls into question the integrity of the American Samoa Environmental Protection Agency’s (AS-EPA) testing methods for drinking water dispensed by commercial vending machines on-island. The unverified conclusions of a high school student’s science fair project have led to the recent labeling of AS-EPA as “negligent” in its handling of water testing for vending machines. AS-EPA disagrees with this negative portrayal, primarily because there is very little comparison between the student’s science project and the water testing routinely conducted by AS-EPA.

AS-EPA operates the only water-testing laboratory in American Samoa that is certified by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US-EPA). The lab renews its US-EPA certification every three years. It has a staff of four full-time lab technicians trained and certified by the US-EPA in the collection and analysis of water samples. Each month, the lab processes an average of 400 water samples collected from our territorial waters. Approximately 200 of these samples are taken from marine waters, which enable AS-EPA to issue advisories to the public regarding water conditions at 44 recreational beaches (advisories are issued weekly for Tutuila and monthly for Aunu’u and Manu’a). The remaining 200 samples relate to drinking water, including samples taken from (a) ASPA water systems on Tutuila, Aunu’u, and Manu’a, (b) local bottled water companies, and (c) water vending machines.

Currently, AS-EPA monitors the 102 commercial water vending machines in operation on Tutuila. In compliance with the National Primary Drinking Water Regulations (40 CFR § 141.21(a)(2)), AS-EPA routinely collects a minimum of one water sample from each vending machine at least once a month. AS-EPA initially tests for the presence of total coliform bacteria. If total coliform bacteria is detected, AS-EPA tests further for the presence of fecal coliform bacteria. If fecal coliform bacteria is detected, AS-EPA shuts down the vending machine immediately until further tests confirm that fecal coliform bacteria is no longer present in the machine’s water.

*Total coliform bacteria* can be described as a large collection of different types of bacteria common in the environment (soil or vegetation) and is generally harmless. It should be

noted that total coliform is everywhere – we might find it on our skin, in our mouths, or on our food. Total coliform is not considered a health risk unless you have a severely compromised immune system. AS-EPA’s major focus is *fecal coliform bacteria*, which is a subgroup of total coliform bacteria that exists in the intestines and feces of humans and animals. Its presence in a drinking water sample often indicates recent fecal contamination. This means that there is a greater risk that disease-causing organisms (pathogens) are present in the water and, therefore, public health may be adversely impacted. AS-EPA reacts quickly and effectively to positive findings of fecal coliform in drinking water.

For drinking water, AS-EPA follows a rigid, US-EPA approved water testing method called “Colilert 18.” Certified analysts follow strict protocols during the collection and handling of each sample in AS-EPA’s state-of-the-art laboratory. The date and result of each water sample test is systematically documented in AS-EPA lab records. After testing water from a vending machine, AS-EPA posts a notice on each machine informing the public that it has been “AS-EPA Tested” (not “AS-EPA approved” as reported by Samoa News). The notice lists (a) the date the sample was collected and tested, (b) whether fecal coliform was detected, and (c) whether the machine is located in an area subject to a “Boil Water Notice.” The AS-EPA notice also explicitly states that “AS-EPA does not guarantee the purity of this water” as the water quality may change during the time interval between routine testing.

For his science fair project, “Analysis of Coliform Presence in Commercial Water Vending Machines,” Manumalo Academy sophomore Brodie Blizzard used the LaMotte Coliform Test Kit. (Each kit contains five tests and can be purchased from online retailers such as Amazon for less than \$20.00 each). The student’s mother, Dr. Amy Blizzard, contends that this test kit is “US-EPA approved,” however, AS-EPA has found no indication that this educational kit is approved by the US-EPA for drinking water compliance testing. The instructions stated directly on the LaMotte test kit advises users that, if there is a positive result, “further steps should be taken to validate these results by a certified bacteriological laboratory.” AS-EPA is unaware of any laboratory validation of Blizzard’s test results. Furthermore, the LaMotte kit used by Blizzard tests for total coliform bacteria only, whereas AS-EPA’s public notice reports the agency’s finding of the more relevant *fecal coliform bacteria*.

A Manumalo Academy official contacted AS-EPA’s Deputy Director Fa’amao Asalele regarding Blizzard’s science project late last year. At the Manumalo official’s request, Deputy Asalele contacted Dr. Amy Blizzard to offer AS-EPA’s assistance, specifically, to offer guidance on the student’s methodologies and to discuss his findings. AS-EPA’s offer was never accepted. The agency only learned of Blizzard’s project results when AS-EPA officials attended the Territorial Science Fair to serve as judges last week.

AS-EPA commends Brodie Blizzard on his scientific aspirations and for taking an interest in the drinking water quality of the Territory. AS-EPA also assures the public that the agency continues to routinely monitor the water vending machines, as required by federal regulation, and will continue to improve upon its regulation and public noticing of these water systems. AS-EPA is committed to regulatory compliance, but more importantly, to the health and safety of our community. Members of the public, especially students, are invited to contact

AS-EPA at 633-2304, or to visit the website at [www.epa.as.gov](http://www.epa.as.gov), for further information regarding AS-EPA's Safe Drinking Water Program.