

Free Ocean Awareness Training course slated

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LAHAINA – Local environmental organizations on Maui are once again joining forces to offer a free Ocean Awareness Training certification course to the community and commercial marine tour operators.

The course will be offered June 2-19 at the Maui Community College Lahaina Education Center, 60 Kenui St., or the Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary Education Center at 726 S. Kihei Road.

Classes will be held from 6 to 8:30 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays in Lahaina, and Mondays and Wednesdays in Kihei.

After completing all six sessions and one field day, participants will receive a C.O.R.A.L. (Care of Our Culture, Ocean, Reefs and Animal Life) certification card.

The course is jointly coordinated by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary, Maui Ocean Center, Hawaii Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR), Project S.E.A.-Link, Maui Reef Fund, Maui Community College Marine Option Program, Hawaii Eco-Nature Society, Hawaii Wildlife Fund, and the Coral Reef Alliance.

Nominated for the 2007 Living Reef Award, this free training course will provide a foundational knowledge base for those employed in the marine recreation industry, community volunteers or anyone who wants to learn more about Hawaii's marine environment.

Each workshop is designed to provide outreach tools and resources, and will cover the basics for anyone out on the water or onshore talking with visitors.

This spring's Ocean Awareness training includes new and exciting topics and guest speakers: Hawaiian Culture with Kupuna Ed Lindsey; Coral Disease with Greta Aeby (Hawaii Institute of Marine Biology); Coral Reef Ecology and the Role of Herbivores with Darla White (DAR); Wetlands and Stream Ecology with Dale Bonar and Scott Fisher (Maui Coastal Land Trust); Water Quality with Megan Webster (Maui Land & Pineapple Co. Inc.) and Robin Knox (Water Quality Consulting); Maui Reef Status with John Mitchell and Russell Sparks (DAR); and Environmental Cultural Ecology, applying culture to everyday interpretation.

"This spring's session is especially significant, because 2008 is the International Year of the Reef (IYOR), and our team is offering new and exciting ways to get involved and make a difference, and put their knowledge and training to use in the community," noted Emily Carlson of NOAA.

This year, the course includes opportunities to participate in hands-on field activities.

Participants will be required to complete one field day component to receive certification.

Opportunities will also be available to assist with education and outreach efforts for International Year of the Reef education stations in both Lahaina Harbor and Central Maui.

The training wrap up party will coincide with an International Year of the Reef event at Maui Ocean Center on June 22.

This certification will help participants meet the requirements for volunteer positions with the Sanctuary's Naturalist Corps Program and other island-wide volunteer opportunities with partner organizations.

Space is limited and registration is required. For more information, or to register, contact Carlson at 879-2818, extension 101, or e-mail emily.carlson@noaa.gov.

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