



## Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency 2021 Year in Review

The year 2021 offered challenges to Hawai'i and the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA), as the agency continued its unprecedented work coordinating the response to COVID-19 while also managing responses to a huge wildfire and multiple severe weather incidents.

At the same time, HI-EMA laid the groundwork for the future with new leadership, continued restructuring, and work to build a foundation for continuous improvement through the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP) process.

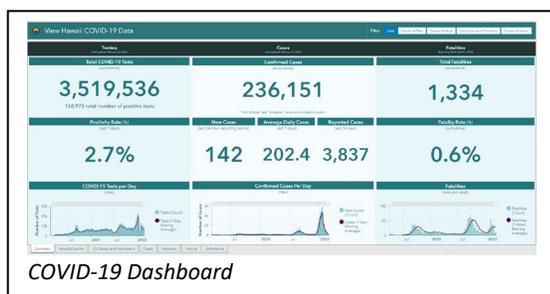
Administrator Luke Meyers, a veteran of emergency management, was promoted to the top leadership role in March 2020. The appointment came just two days after Governor David Ige proclaimed a statewide emergency for the COVID-19 pandemic and a few weeks before torrential rains caused flooding on Kaua'i.



*L-R: Hawai'i County Civil Defense Officer Joshua Black and Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency Administrator Luke Meyers survey the damage from the Mana Road Fire in Hawai'i County, Hawai'i, Aug. 8, 2021*

The twin challenges of natural disasters and the pandemic continued to shape HI-EMA's battle rhythm during 2021 as the Agency pursued its mission to help the Hawai'i 'ohana prepare for, mitigate against, respond to, and recover from disasters and emergencies.

At the same time, Meyers and Executive Officer David Lopez led the HI-EMA Team in developing emergency management plans to address some of the biggest threats faced by Hawai'i, including the daunting prospects of storms and tsunamis large enough to stop operations at the Port of Honolulu and Honolulu International Airport, creating statewide supply-chain disruptions for food and fuel.



But COVID-19 was a constant drumbeat behind HI-EMA's work, as it was throughout most aspects of our daily lives. During 2021, HI-EMA continued to manage its COVID-19 dashboard and Common Operating Picture report to assure that all partners involved in the COVID response shared a clear and reliable set of information to guide their actions.

HI-EMA began the year by coordinating with the Hawai'i State Department of Health to manage a statewide vaccination effort, and kept working as surges of the delta and omicron variants of COVID-19 required changes in the Safe Travels program, assistance from contracted medical personnel from the mainland, and fast action to combat a shortage of oxygen supplies across the state.

HI-EMA continued pursuing a long-term vision to build a new facility to support State-wide emergency management program activities. HI-EMA participated in multiple meetings for the First Responder Technology Campus (FRTC). Administrator Meyers acted as the Co-Chair of the FRTC Champions group representing HI-EMA for 2021. The Agency secured grant funding for initial design and engineering for facilities at the FRTC.



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**OPERATIONS BRANCH:** Steve Sigler and Eulalio Medina led operations through more than a year of coordinating during COVID-19, the longest emergency activation in the agency's history. The new Operations Branch Chief, Matthew Wall, started work in October 2021 and faced immediate challenges, including the Kona Low Storm in early December 2021 and monitoring water contamination from the Red Hill fuel tanks.

The Operations Branch coordinated and executed an array of activities, both for direct emergency response and for near- to long-range planning, along with revising foundational documents to ensure accountability and continuity of operations.

Two major efforts involved:

- HI-EMA's ongoing work in planning and coordinating changes in the Safe Travels Hawai'i program to limit the threat of infection from tourism, and
- Creation of a task force to ensure the state had sufficient medical oxygen supplies when the surge of patients suffering from the delta variant of COVID-19 strained the health care system.



*Matthew Wall – Operations  
Branch Chief*

A third, Agency-wide effort, led by Operations Branch, required compiling a comprehensive, consistent, and up-to-date set of governance documents to lay out how HI-EMA runs and guide its future operations. The standards will be reviewed in early 2022 as HI-EMA seeks accreditation by the Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP).



**Niewa Gardner**  
Training Officer

*Niewa Gardner - State Training Officer*

The reorganized Operations Branch also absorbed the functions of the preparedness unit, still overseen by Eulalio Medina, and the training program under Niewa Gardner. Operations ran seven workshops and two tabletop exercises to test and refine elements of the emergency response system of the State and its partners, as well as two seminars and two planning sessions to identify additional training needs. In addition, planners developed and submitted a revised Integrated Preparedness Plan to the Federal

Emergency Management Agency and updated HI-EMA's Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment/Stakeholder Preparedness Review.

As part of the ongoing documentation for the COVID-19 Incident Response, Operations Branch produced 188 Situation Reports, 365 Common Operating Picture reports and 52 Incident Action Plans during 2021; that brought the total for the incident to 490 Situation Reports and 102 Incident Action Plans as of Dec. 31, 2021.



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### EOC Activations

- Jan. 24, 2020 to Present – COVID-19 emergency (All EOCs partial activation)
- January 2021 – Flash Flood Warning (Kaua'i EOC partial activation)
- February 2021 – Flash Flood Warning (Hawai'i and Maui EOCs partial activation)
- March 2021 – Kermadec Islands Tsunami Watch (all EOCs activation); March 8-18 Severe Weather/Flooding (all EOCs full activation); Flash Flood Warning/Hanalei Bridge (Kaua'i EOC partial activation)
- May 2021 – Kaua'i Police search and rescue operations (Kaua'i EOC partial activation)
- June 2021 – Hamakua wildland fire (Hawai'i EOC partial activation)
- July 2021 – Kohala bush fire (Hawai'i EOC partial activation); Saddle Road Fire (Hawai'i EOC partial activation); Alaska earthquake and tsunami watch (all EOC activation); Mana Road Fire (Hawai'i EOC partial activation)
- August 2021 – Severe weather from remnants of Tropical Cyclone Linda (SEOC partial activation, Hawai'i EOC partial activation, Honolulu EOC enhanced steady state)
- October 2021 – 6.2 magnitude local earthquake (Hawai'i EOC partial activation); flood warning (Hawai'i EOC partial activation)
- November 2021 – Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam housing water contamination (SEOC tracking); Kalihi Valley fire (Honolulu EOC partially activated)
- December 2021 – Severe weather related to "Kona Low" system (SEOC and all County EOCs partial activation); Honolulu Marathon (Honolulu EOC partially activated); Flood warnings (Maui EOC partially activated, Honolulu EOC partially activated, Kaua'i EOC partially activated, extending into January 2022)

**RESILIENCE BRANCH:** Led by Lorinda Wong-Lau, the branch worked with FEMA and applicants to get two federally declared disasters approved for the State of Hawai'i.

- *DR4604* for Severe Storms and Flooding (March 8-18, 2021) was a major declaration for emergency work and the repair or replacement of disaster-damaged facilities. Although the storms and flooding affected other areas, the County of Maui was the only county with enough damage to warrant a federal declaration.
- *FM5404* for the Mana Road Fire (August 1-3, 2021) was a fire management assistance grant for eligible emergency protective measures. The County of Hawai'i was the only affected county.



Lorinda Wong-Lau - Resilience  
Branch Chief

In addition, the Branch conducted damage assessments for the Kona Low incident that struck multiple islands beginning Dec. 5, 2021. The U.S. Small Business Administration declared a disaster in January 2022



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in connection with the severe weather, flooding, and landslides, providing low-interest loan assistance for qualified renters, homeowners and businesses in the City and County of Honolulu, and Counties of Maui and Kalawao. Additional assistance requests were pending as of early February 2022.



*Members of the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency Resilience Branch join Federal Emergency Management Agency and Maui County team members in conducting damage assessments following the December 2021 "Kona low" storm, Dec. 20, 2021*

The Public Assistance team is managing projects from more than 10 open disasters that total about \$209.8 million in reimbursement to State and county agencies and private non-profit agencies. The team submitted 61 projects for project closeout; no disaster grants were submitted for closeout in 2021.

The State received up to 15% of the obligated public assistance dollars for hazard mitigation grants under new disasters. Mitigation efforts involve the vital counterpart to assistance grants – supporting projects to prevent or reduce future damage from disasters. The new grants in 2021 were:

- \$1.5 million received for County of Maui projects related to March 2021 flooding and landslides.
- \$20 million received for projects throughout the state related to COVID-19.
- \$584,000 received for County of Hawaii projects related to the Mana Road Fire.

Within the Resilience Branch the hazard mitigation team, is managing projects which total more than \$8 million in eligible expenses to State and county agencies and private non-profit organization under eight grants.

The team also submitted two mitigation grants for closeout.

- PDM16, a 2016 pre-disaster mitigation grant for state and county planning projects, \$370,000 received.
- National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program 2019 grant for tsunami projects, \$575,000 received.

**LOGISTICS BRANCH:** With the re-brand of the Logistics Branch completed in April, Carlos Rowe joined HI-EMA in September as the new branch chief, overseeing both the logistical and telecommunications functions of the Agency. Logistics continued its critical role in supporting the statewide distribution of personal protective equipment during the COVID-19 response.

Managing assets not only in the HI-EMA warehouse inside Diamond Head crater but spread across multiple state facilities, Logistics branch distributed supplies and equipment from a cache valued at about \$85



*Carlos Rowe - Logistics Branch Chief*



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million. The continuing distribution effort represents the largest movement of medical supplies in Hawai'i since World War II.

The newly reorganized Logistics Branch also incorporated the former telecommunications functions of HI-EMA, overseeing the physical, electronic and digital warning systems essential to notifying the people of Hawai'i about tsunamis and other threats. That role included monthly tests of the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS), as well as preventive maintenance and repair of one of the largest outdoor warning siren networks in the world.

Logistics also managed and maintained the facilities that support HI-EMA and its mission, including the World War I-era Birkhimer Battery that houses the State Emergency Operations Center, and the 24/7 monitoring post known as the State Warning Point.

**FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION BRANCH:** Established and staffed to support HI-EMA, the branch led by Kari Rachlin followed its 2020 reorganization efforts with additional steps in 2021 to improve efficiency and effectiveness across the Agency.

Among its accomplishments in 2021, Finance and Administration Branch:



*Kari Rachlin - Finance and  
Administration Branch Chief*

- Won approval from the Legislature to convert HI-EMA leadership positions to exempt status which allowed for the successful recruitment and filling of five key leadership positions;
  - Established an Emergency Management Specialist Class within the personnel system;
  - Implemented internal controls and procedures across the organization to resolve 24 areas of concern previously raised by FEMA regarding handling of disaster and non-disaster grants, and providing clear documentation and accountability for grants in the future;
  - Approval of a special project by the Governor to bolster grants and project management throughout HI-EMA; and
- Timely submission and approval/award of four grant applications for formula and competitive grants:
    - Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) 2021;
    - Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) 2021-ARPA;
    - National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP) 2021; and
    - Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant Program (RCPGP) 2021.

The HI-EMA grants team was able to secure nearly \$10 million dollars (\$18 million including match) in grant funding in just 90 days, including the highly competitive Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant Program awarded Aug. 31, 2021.

**EXTERNAL AFFAIRS BRANCH:** In a year that highlighted the need for accurate information, the External Affairs Branch issued or shared more than 85 news releases and other official communications to keep the



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public informed. Social media also played a vital role, with the HI-EMA Team sharing information with more than 30,000 followers on Twitter, Facebook, and other platforms.

The team, led by Doug Carroll for much of the year and Communication Director Adam Weintraub starting in October, also crafted multiple public information outreach campaigns, including a widely seen animated public service announcement on tsunami awareness. The team also promoted a new "Know Your Hazards" map developed by the Operations Branch, and helped Hawai'i to prepare with their participation in hazard awareness/readiness events such as the Hurricane Season kickoff and the Great Shakeout for earthquake safety.



*Adam Weintraub -  
Communication Director*

External Affairs also coordinated requests for speakers (mostly via the Internet or videoconference during COVID) and preparedness materials to help HI-EMA fulfill its duty to help prepare Hawai'i to be ready if a natural or human-caused hazard threatens.

### **2021 ADMINISTRATOR AWARDS**

To recognize outstanding work by the HI-EMA Team, Administrator Meyers continued the tradition of honoring team members for actions that support core values of the Agency.

- Malama (to care for or protect) Award – Shaun Brown, of the Logistics Branch, for his steadfast efforts as a warehouse worker throughout the year to ensure the distribution of vital Personal Protective Equipment during the COVID-19 response.
- Po'okela (commitment to excellence) Award – A joint award to Savanna Holloway-Ledo, Trenna Sykes-Hebert, Kristy Carpio, Joanna Chang, and Ruth "Steph" Teraoka, of the Finance and Administration Branch, for their work to implement and improve a new system of processes and procedures to manage HI-EMA's finances and vital federal grants.
- Wiwo'ole (courage) Award – Kelsey Yamanaka, of the Resilience Branch, who was responsible for managing all open projects in the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program and Pre-Disaster Mitigation grant program, while also serving a vital role in the planning section of the State Emergency Operations Center.



*Shaun Brown and HI-EMA Administrator Luke Meyers - Malama Award*



*L-R: Joanna Chang, Kristy Carpio, Trenna Sykes-Hebert, Ruth "Steph" Teraoka, Savanna Holloway-Ledo, and HI-EMA Administrator Luke Meyers – Po'okela Award*



## Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency 2021 Year in Review

These awards were presented in January 2022 at a virtual all-hands meeting.

### **OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES:**

The Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency has always been guided by core values: Malama – To care for or protect, Po'okela – Commitment to excellence, Laulima – Cooperation, and Wiwo'ole – Courage. These ethics and the integrity of both leadership and HI-EMA Team provide Hawai'i with the steady hand and strong support structure necessary to weather difficult times, and to safely navigate the future.

2021 continued to challenge HI-EMA. State budget cuts and the loss of positions hampered capacities and capabilities, but HI-EMA compensated with federal grant funding and the agility to solve problems with the resources at hand.

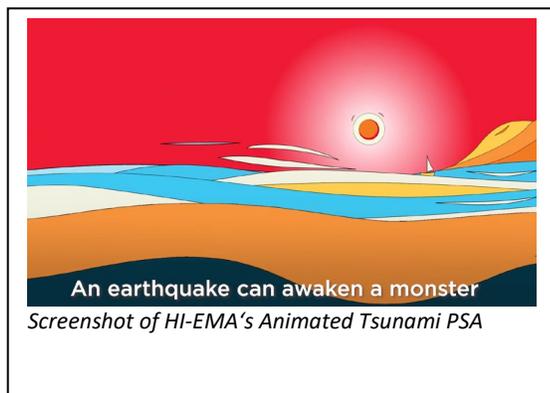
With a leadership reorganization, including recruitment and hiring, HI-EMA created stability for the road ahead and leveraged the opportunity to realign the organization. A measurement of the State Emergency Management Program started with a process through EMAP; though accreditation might not be on the immediate horizon, the value of the HI-EMA Team is being documented and a continuous improvement of the organization is part of the view ahead.

As we enter the third year of the COVID-19 virus, HI-EMA's experts and support staff are still coordinating, communicating, and collaborating. This vital work undoubtedly will be further complicated by other natural and human-caused incidents that will impact our State.

As we move forward in 2022, the HI-EMA will build on lessons learned from 2021 and focus our vision ahead clearly on the strategic items laid out the [2020-2025 Emergency Management Strategic Plan](#).



*Kelsey Yamanaka and HI-EMA Administrator Luke Meyers - Wiwo'ole Award*



*An earthquake can awaken a monster  
Screenshot of HI-EMA's Animated Tsunami PSA*



*Members of the Hawai'i National Guard work in the HI-EMA warehouse boxing personal protective equipment for statewide distribution*



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*Rep. Tina Wildberger and Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency Administrator Luke Meyers survey flood damage on Ho'okipa Street, Maui, Hawai'i, Jan. 4, 2022*



*New generators at the Wilcox Medical Center on Kaua'i add redundant capability in case of power outages, Jan. 25, 2022*