



HAWAI'I EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY  
Ke'ena Ho'omalua Pōulua O Hawai'i

# Laulima

*Working Together*

A Quarterly Newsletter for Our Partners and Community | Mei/May 2026

## Administrator's Message

By James DS. Barros

Over the past quarter, Hawai'i has once again been reminded that severe weather can test our islands quickly and unevenly. The recent Kona Low events brought intense rainfall, damaging winds, flash flooding, and hazardous surf that affected



homes, roads, businesses, and critical services in communities across the state. To everyone who experienced loss or disruption – whether in Waialua, 'Iao Valley, or Ka'ū – we see you, we're with you, and we remain committed to supporting your recovery.

During these Kona Low events, HIEMA worked alongside county emergency management agencies, state and federal partners, and the entire emergency management enterprise to coordinate response efforts and speed resources where they were needed most. Our team supported statewide situational awareness, helped connect requests for assistance to available capabilities, and coordinated with agencies

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## Coming through the Kona Lows



**Flooding in Waialua on March 20**  
*Photo by U.S. Coast Guard Oceania.*

## A tale of survival from Hawai'i's deadliest disaster

80 years ago, on April 1, 1946, a tsunami caused by an earthquake in Alaska struck Hawai'i, killing 159 people here. On page 6 in this issue, read excerpts from the account of Marsue McGinnis McShane, who was swept to sea and survived.



► Wreckage in Hilo. *Photo from the Hawai'i State Archives.*

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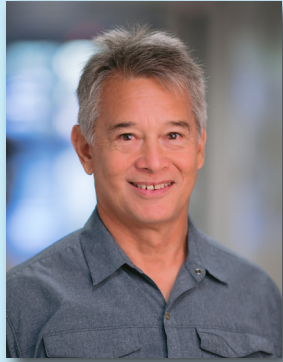
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## Hawai'i Island

The start of 2026 brought fire and rain to the Big Island, along with a couple



Talmadge Magno, HCCDA

of servings of volcanic tephra. The south winds that accompanied the Kona Low storms also complicated two of Kīlauea's eruptions early in 2026. Trade winds tend to push

tephra from Kīlauea towards the Ka'u desert. But the southerly winds on January 24 blew debris from the fiery lava fountains toward viewing areas in Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, across Highway 11 and onto roofs and water catchment systems of communities north and east of the park. Similar conditions prompted alerts on March 10, just before the first major Kona storm arrived. Team Rubicon, Volcano Emergency Response Team, and other community partners coordinated with Civil Defense to conduct tephra cleanup. Our Community Emergency Response Team leadership also led several free training sessions to help the public learn the emergency response skills we rely on during an incident.

## Maui, Moloka'i & Lāna'i

Aloha mai kākou - As Maui Nui continues recovering from the recent Kona storms, I want to extend a sincere mahalo to everyone who supported the Maui Emergency Management Agency in disaster assessment efforts.

An 'ōlelo no'ēau I recently shared with my team is: "Ma ka hana ka 'ike" meaning, in working, one learns.

This reminder speaks deeply to the work we do in emergency management. Excellence is built, not given. Skill comes

from showing up consistently, learning through experience and honoring the responsibilities placed in our hands. When we commit to our work with discipline and integrity, our performance naturally elevates both our teams and the communities we serve.



Amos Lonokailua-Hewett, MEMA

Recently we participated in the 93rd Civil Support Team training exercise and Makani Pāhili, both of which strengthened coordination, communication and operational readiness among agencies and partners. MEMA hosted our Emergency Preparedness Expo, uniting 42 partner organizations to share resources, information and services with the community.

Maui County recently redesigned its website platform, including a refreshed MEMA webpage with accessibility and navigation improvements. I invite you to visit our new site at [mauicounty.gov/MEMA](http://mauicounty.gov/MEMA).

May we continue carrying the spirit of "Ma ka hana ka 'ike" in all that we do, learning through service, growing through experience and leading with purpose.

## O'ahu

The response to the March Kona Low storms demonstrated the strength and resilience of our O'ahu community. I want to sincerely thank residents for looking out for one another, staying informed, and taking



Randal Collins, DEM

preparedness and safety messages seriously throughout the storms. From neighbors helping neighbors to community organizations stepping up to support recovery efforts, we saw firsthand how much we can accomplish when our community comes together during challenging times.

From emergency notifications and shelter operations to damage assessments and recovery coordination, our teams worked around the clock alongside partners across

government and the community to support impacted areas across O'ahu. While recovery efforts continue, these storms served as an important reminder that Hawai'i's severe weather threats extend beyond hurricane season alone.

As we prepare for the start of hurricane season, I encourage all residents to review their emergency plans, refresh disaster supply kits, and stay informed through trusted official sources. At the O'ahu Department of Emergency Management, we remain committed to strengthening readiness and resilience across our island communities.

## Kaua'i

Aloha from Kaua'i! The Kaua'i Emergency Management Agency continues to strengthen regional coordination and disaster response capabilities through both proactive planning and mutual aid.



Elton Ushio, KEMA

Following the Kona Low storms, Kaua'i deployed personnel to Maui to support the Maui Emergency Management Agency's Emergency Operations Center (EOC). The team assisted with planning, operations, logistics and damage assessment during response and early recovery, helping maintain situational awareness and operational continuity. Another team was deployed to support the O'ahu Department of Emergency Management EOC. These deployments reflect the strong collaboration among counties and our shared commitment to supporting one another in times of need.

At home, KEMA is advancing wildfire protection following the passage of Bill 2961, integrating Wildland-Urban Interface safety standards into county zoning and permitting. Key updates include a Firewise Community program, HMGP awards for GIS and backup generators, and updates to hazard mitigation and emergency operations plans.

KEMA is committed to building a more resilient community through preparedness, coordination, and shared kuleana.

*Administrator's Message continued*

responsible for transportation, public works, utilities, health and human services, and public safety. As conditions shifted hour by hour, the focus remained clear: protect life and safety, maintain essential services, and help impacted communities stabilize and recover.

But the most powerful response wasn't only what happened in coordination calls or operations centers – it was what happened in neighborhoods.

Time and again, we saw the strength of Hawai'i in action: families checking on kūpuna and neighbors, community groups organizing clean-ups, volunteers helping to distribute supplies, local organizations opening doors to provide support, and residents sharing reliable information to keep each other safe. This is what resilience looks like in Hawai'i – people

coming together, not waiting to be asked, and lifting each other up.

Emergency management is a team sport. Government can help coordinate resources and support – but true readiness and recovery depend on community involvement. When residents take action before, during, and after an event, the entire system works better. Small, practical steps – clearing drains, securing outdoor items, having a family plan, knowing evacuation routes, keeping emergency supplies on hand, and checking on those who may need extra help – make a measurable difference when storms arrive. Initiatives such as HIEMA's Hawai'i Hazards and Awareness Resilience Program can help communities prepare for emergencies.

As we continue recovery, we're also focused on strengthening preparedness for the next event. Kona Lows are a part of Hawai'i's hazard landscape, and we must treat each storm as both a challenge and a lesson. Together with our partners, we will

continue working to improve coordination, reduce risk where possible, and support mitigation efforts that make communities safer over the long term. Let's be better stewards for our 'ohana, our communities, and our 'āina.

Mahalo nui loa to our county partners, state agencies, first responders, volunteer and faith-based organizations, community leaders, and residents across Hawai'i. Your collaboration is the foundation of our resilience. Please continue to stay informed through trusted sources, look out for one another, and consider getting involved in your community.

We are stronger together, and together we will recover. Let's be ready to meet the next challenge with the same unity and resolve.

Me ke aloha,  
James

## **National wildfire award goes to Kaua'i Planning Director**

County of Kaua'i Planning Director Ka'aina Hull has been awarded the 2026 National Wildfire Mitigation Award by the International Association of Fire Chiefs. The award recognizes "outstanding service and innovation in reducing wildfire risk and advancing community wildfire adaptation," the county said in a press release.

Hull's work focused on the establishment of a wildfire mitigation ordinance for high-risk communities on Kaua'i, particularly historic plantation camp neighborhoods. Mayor Derek Kawakami signed the bill into law on Sept. 8, 2025.

"Ka'aina's leadership reflects the very best of public service," said Mayor Kawakami. "He stepped beyond the traditional role of planning and brought people together to address one of the most urgent challenges facing our island. This recognition highlights not only his dedication, but our county's commitment to protecting our communities and building a safer, more resilient Kaua'i."



**Ka'aina Hull, Director of Planning for the County of Kaua'i.** Photo provided.

The wildfire mitigation ordinance that Hull developed reduces wildfire risk for communities in the wildland-urban interface, where residential areas meet natural wildfire fuel. Recent research by wildfire experts, including investigation of fires in Lahaina and Los Angeles, identify this area as being critical to protecting residents from wildfire.

The ordinance requires: A five-foot noncombustible zone around structures; a 30-foot zone with vegetation management and fuel reduction; a 100-foot zone with landscape management; home hardening including ignition-resistant materials for roofs, vents, decks and underfloor areas; and standards for windows and exterior construction.

Additional aspects in the ordinance include evacuation safety and emergency access through ingress and egress routes; wildfire preparedness workshops for residents; and coordinated defensible space cleanups.

Hull also established a county-led home assessment program to evaluate wildfire vulnerabilities and assist residents with wildfire mitigation.

"This recognition belongs to the many partners, departments and community members who came together to make this possible," Hull said in a press release. "Wildfire mitigation is a shared responsibility, and this work shows what can be achieved when we collaborate with purpose to protect our communities."

Visit [kauai.gov/fire](http://kauai.gov/fire) for wildfire resources, or call 808-241-4985.

# Home wildfire prep: Creating defensible space for dry season

As Hawai'i enters wildfire season, taking steps now to prepare your home can significantly reduce your risk. One of the most effective ways to protect your property is by creating a defensible space in the area around your home.

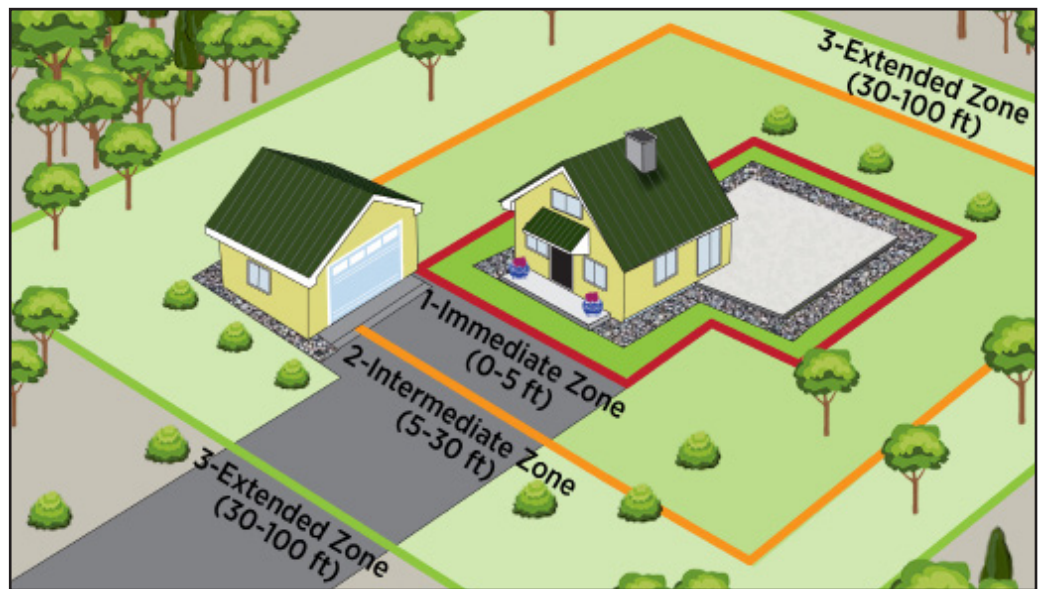
## Zone 1: Immediate Zone (0-5 feet)

This immediate area is critical because it is where embers are most likely to ignite materials and allow fire to spread to your home's structure.

Start by removing all dead vegetation, dry leaves, and debris from your roof, gutters, porch, entryways and your home's apron.

Within this 5-foot zone, ensure that no flammable materials are stored near your home. This includes things like firewood, scrap wood, brooms or garden tools, grass clippings or wooden furniture.. Move these items as far away from structures as possible.

Inspect your home for vulnerabilities. Seal gaps or openings where embers could enter, especially around



vents, eaves, and under decks.

Take note of where leaves and debris naturally gather when they're blown by the wind, such as in the corner of a porch. This is likely where embers will blow as well. Keep an eye on this space and keep it clear, especially during risky fire weather.

## Zone 2: Intermediate Zone (5-30 ft)

Keep grass well-watered and trimmed to a height of four inches or less. Maintain proper spacing between plants and shrubs to prevent fire from easily traveling from one fuel source to another. If possible, replace highly flammable plants with fire-resistant landscaping such as succulents

or native Hawaiian plants that retain moisture.

Trim trees to keep them 10 feet apart and 10 feet away from your home.

Consider using non-combustible materials for landscaping features such as gravel, stone, or concrete to create a buffer between your home and surrounding vegetation.

## Zone 3: Extended Zone (30-100 ft)

Space out shrubs and trees both horizontally and vertically so fire can't spread. Trim grass below four inches. Keep 10 feet of clear space around wood piles and outbuildings.

## Stormy Weather BOOK CLUB

### Finding lifelong lessons in kids' fantasy classic 'The Phantom Tollbooth'

*The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster, with illustrations by Jules Feiffer

Review by Jill Matsumoto, HIEMA Information Specialist

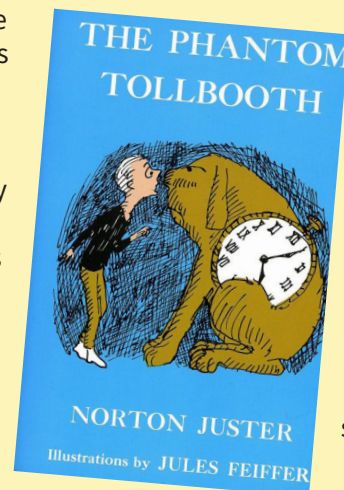
"There once was a boy named Milo who didn't know what to do with himself—not just sometimes, but always."

He's bored, uninterested in the world around him, and regards learning as a waste of time.

And then one day he receives a mysterious package—"For Milo, who has plenty of time." In the package—a tollbooth, precautionary signs (to be used in a precautionary fashion), assorted coins (for paying tolls), a book of rules and traffic regulations, and...a map.

So begins *The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster, a story about a boy who learns the world can be a fascinating place—if he only allows himself to experience it.

With nothing better to do, Milo sets off an adventure that will challenge his boredom and lack of enthusiasm for learning. Along



the way, he jumps to the Island of Conclusions, conducts a sunrise, meets a Which and a Whether Man, visits the kingdoms of Digitopolis and Dictionopolis, thinks his way out of the Doldrums, and eventually returns the princesses of Sweet Rhyme and Pure Reason to a world that sorely needs them.

Juster's wordplay adds whimsy to a gentle and humorous tale of a boy who learns that seeking knowledge isn't a waste of time, but a fun, challenging, and often odd endeavor. That life is never dull. And that, sometimes, you can learn a lot without meaning to.



# 'I don't care what happens, I'm going to survive this'

## Tsunami survivor's incredible account of April 1, 1946

**Editor's note:** Born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1924, Marsue McGinnis McShane arrived to teach at Laupāhoehoe School in September 1945. She was swept to sea by the tsunami that struck Hawai'i on April 1, 1946, and survived. 24 students and teachers from Laupāhoehoe School were killed.

The following are excerpts from a lengthy interview conducted in 1999 by Warren Nishimoto for the Center for Oral History at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

...

I signed up to teach in Hawai'i in the first weeks of March '45. The atomic bomb had not been dropped. War was still going on in the Pacific. ... I knew nothing about Hawai'i except that I wanted to teach around the world and this was a way.

When we arrived, we were met at Hilo. The first time I had been on an airplane. I'd gone up in an airplane once at a county fair, but I'd never been on a [big] airplane before. We went on Hawaiian Airlines down from O'ahu to the Big Island. As we flew along the Big Island, we saw the cliffs and the water and everything, and finally this little peninsula. "Oh, there's Laupāhoehoe!"

And then we got to Laupāhoehoe and we went down, down, down, down that road which is now closed. And there we were. The [teachers'] cottage was right on the ocean. No trees in front, it was rocky, no sand, the waves crashing up and beautiful. And of course, we turned around and looked at the mountains and Mauna Kea. And I thought, it's so wonderful!

Well, it was the week before spring vacation. Everything was ready for this final week. We give tests, art projects were due and all of this sort of thing. April 1 was Monday. Of course, April Fools' Day.

The school day started at 8, but the kids began to arrive at 6:30 because that's when their parents were due in the fields and so forth. So they'd drop their kids off or the buses would start arriving at 6:30. And we could hear the swings rattling ... But we heard this



**Marsue McGinnis McShane**

*Photo courtesy of University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.*

knock on the door. It was Danny Akiona and he said, "Come and see the tidal wave." And we thought, tidal wave? ...

And our vision of a tidal wave was what still today everybody else thinks of: *The Poseidon Adventure*. We thought of the John Hall, Dorothy Lamour movies where they say, "Here it comes. Here it comes," and they climb up a palm tree and all the bad guys are washed out and the good guys climb down and that's over with. ...

Fay Johnson and I went out on the porch in front to get a picture. ... I noticed that Fred Kruse and his science students were out there on the rocks looking at the uncovered seaweed. ... This wave just got bigger and bigger. That was the first time that anybody around us thought to be afraid. Here we were, landlubbers, and it never occurred to anybody to be afraid. ...

Fay and I went to go out the back, down the steps and run away to higher land. But we got as far as the doorway. ... And I remember looking back and the water was just fighting. It broke the glass, and the cottage went whoomf! ... I remember grabbing Helen Kingseed by the arm, but she was just sucked right away.

We were in the water and hanging on to the roof. ... Just the roof was left. ...

and by God, it started sucking out again! ... Our only hope was, while it's sucked out, to climb off the roof and in because the next one is just going to smash the roof and everything. We climbed off the roof, onto the rocks and we were making our way over the seaweed.

We got that far and it tidal waved again. And that's when I knew I was gone, because I knew the rocks were there, I knew there was no way to wash up. I could feel myself being clunked and turned around and bubbled. But I was a good swimmer, so I took a breath before going down. ... I thought, my lungs are going to burst. But just before I did that, bubbles and everything, I kind of came up. I took another breath and went down again.

But then I did come up a third time and I was right by the top of the lighthouse. ... And all around me was wreckage of the cottages, just trees and boards and everything. So I grabbed hold of a piece of a house, and I thought, every bone in my body must be broken. But I could tread water and my arms moved. And I said, "Well, nothing's broken, I'm bruised but not broken." ...

My one thought, before it tidal waves again, I gotta get out and away from the cliffs. I'm going to be slammed against the cliffs or the rocks again. So I kind of paddled my way ... I did get out, sort of into a stream that was going down this way with all this rubbish and everything.

I knew then that I don't care what happens, I'm going to survive this.

I finally got a hold of a door that wasn't rough and kind of big, so I clung to that and I kind of raised myself up. I got seasick and it rained. I thought about sharks and octopuses and things like that. Here I was.

An hour went by, two hours went by, no help, no indication anybody knew I was out here. ... I saw what looked like two or three boys on a door or raft, and their faces were all white, like their skin

*Continued on page 5*