



HAWAII EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY
Ke'ena Ho'omalū Pōhuli O Hawai'i

Laulima

Working Together

A Quarterly Newsletter for Our Partners and Community | Iulai/July 2026

South Kona and Ka'ū recover from quake



This property in Captain Cook was destroyed and the earth displaced by several feet after a 6.0-magnitude earthquake struck Hawai'i Island on May 22. Photo: HIEMA

Administrator's Message

by David Lopez

Aloha—

I am honored to serve as the new Administrator of the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency, and I am grateful for the opportunity to lead HIEMA at such an important time for our state.

My career has been shaped by service, planning, and response. I previously served with HIEMA as Executive Officer and Hurricane Program Manager, and most recently as the State Disaster

Recovery Coordinator and chief of the Hawai'i Office of Recovery and Resiliency. Across those roles, I have had the privilege of working alongside dedicated professionals focused on helping our communities prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters.

Earlier in my career, I also served in the U.S. Army and worked in crisis management roles supporting complex operations around the world. Each of those experiences reinforced for me that emergency management is ultimately

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Milestone on Maui

Front Street blessing marks important step forward in recovery



Kumu Kaponohai Molitau blesses the Front Street railing and sidewalk during a ceremony on July 1. Photo credit: Mia A'i, County of Maui

On July 1, 2026, residents, local leaders, and County of Maui officials gathered along Front Street to celebrate an important milestone in Lahaina's recovery following the 2023 wildfires. The Front Street Blessing Ceremony marked the completion of the Front Street Railing and Walkway Project, signaling continued progress toward restoration.

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Hawai'i Island

A difficult spring in South Kona and Ka'ū continued with another hefty



Talmadge Magno, HCCDA

storm in April and a magnitude-6.0 earthquake that struck late on May 22, with shaking felt across the state. The immediate response required clearing rockfalls

from roads and a few power outages and rescues from damaged residences. Over the next several weeks, Hawai'i County Civil Defense received more than 500 damage reports related to foundation damage, ruptured water catchment systems, broken pipes and other earthquake damage. County, state and federal teams eventually visited more than 300 properties to conduct Joint Preliminary Damage Assessments in support of potential applications for federal disaster assistance. Meanwhile, the continuing eruption series at Kilauea passed a milestone on June 27 with Episode 50 of lava fountaining since December 2024. Fortunately, trade winds kept the ashfall primarily in the national park and sparsely populated parts of Ka'ū.

Maui, Moloka'i & Lāna'i

Aloha mai kākou,

MEMA continues to advance planning, outreach and operational readiness across Maui Nui. Since our last newsletter, staff have supported 30 community events and engagements, including the MEMA Emergency

Preparedness Expo, the Lāna'i Pineapple Festival and Aviation Day at the airport.



Amos Lonokailua-Hewett, MEMA

while personnel throughout the agency are nearing completion of 41 emergency plans with more plans in the works. Staff have also exercised these plans to evaluate procedures, identify gaps and strengthen coordination.

Wildfire mitigation remains a priority, including continued work on the Critical Corridors Project. We also anticipate transitioning into Maui County's new Emergency Operations Center within the next quarter.

We are grateful for the partnerships and shared commitment that continue to strengthen preparedness throughout Maui Nui.

Mālama kekahi i kekahi. Take care of one another.

O'ahu

Aloha from the City and County of Honolulu Department of Emergency Management! We are excited to share the O'ahu



Randal Collins, DEM

Hazard Explorer, a free online tool that helps people learn about hazards in communities across O'ahu. Users can enter an address or drop a pin on the map to see if a location is in a tsunami evacuation zone, flood zone, wildfire risk area, or dam and levee evacuation area. The tool also includes information about each hazard, preparedness tips, and options to print or share

These opportunities allow our team to connect directly with residents, visitors and community partners.

Our fully staffed External Affairs Section is coordinating outreach and educational campaigns,

results. By bringing several hazard maps together in one place, the O'ahu Hazard Explorer makes it easier for residents to understand their risk and take simple steps to prepare before an emergency. The tool can also support community outreach, emergency planning, and public education. We invite you to explore the O'ahu Hazard Explorer at [honolulu.gov/myhazards](https://hawaii.gov/honolulu.gov/myhazards) and share it with your community to help build a more prepared Hawai'i.

Kaua'i

Aloha from Kaua'i! The Kaua'i Emergency Management Agency (KEMA) continues to strengthen island resilience through long-range planning and proactive hurricane season preparedness.



Elton Ushio, KEMA

This spring, the county finalized its 2026 Kaua'i Multi-Hazard

Mitigation and Resilience Plan, a five-year strategy for reducing risks from natural hazards including tropical cyclones, wildfire, flooding, tsunami, and coastal erosion. Developed with extensive community input, the plan received final approval in May from Mayor Derek Kawakami, the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, maintaining the county's eligibility for future mitigation and disaster recovery funding.

Ahead of hurricane season, KEMA also released an updated potential refuge area list, a personal preparedness tool to help residents and visitors identify potential refuge locations, including Best Available Refuge Area (BARA+) facilities that may offer increased protection during high wind events.

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

mately about people, partnerships, and preparedness.

As I step into this role, my focus is on strengthening HIEMA's ability to serve the people of Hawai'i across the full spectrum of emergency management: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. I believe our work must remain grounded in a whole-community approach, built on strong coordination with counties, state agencies, community organizations, private-sector partners,

and the public.

We must continue improving readiness, enhancing communication and warning systems, strengthening resource coordination, and ensuring our planning serves all communities across our islands.

Emergency management doctrine reminds us that planning must represent the whole population and its needs, and that response is strongest when coordination is clear, disciplined, and unified. Those principles will continue to guide my approach. My goal is to help build a HIEMA that is oper-

ationally ready, strategically focused, and committed to resilience for the long term.

I look forward to working with all of our partners as we continue this mission together. Mahalo for all that you do to support preparedness and resilience across Hawai'i.

Mahalo,
David

Big Island residents rebound from M6 earthquake

Recovery efforts continue after a magnitude-6.0 earthquake struck South Kona and Ka'u on May 22, with county, state, federal, nonprofit, and community partners working together to help residents rebuild.

While more than 7,000 people reported shaking to the U.S. Geological Survey from as far as Ni'ihau, the most significant impacts were experienced in the rural communities of South Kona and Ka'u. What began as a late evening earthquake quickly became one of the most damaging seismic events Hawai'i has experienced in recent years.

Teams from Hawai'i County Civil Defense Agency, Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency, FEMA, the U.S. Small Business Administration, Kaua'i Emergency Management Agency, and other partner agencies spent several weeks conducting detailed damage assessments throughout the affected communities. Residents reported that at least 548 homes sustained damage. Of the 313 homes formally assessed, 18 were considered destroyed, 92 received major damage, 188 sustained minor damage, and 15 were classified as affected.

The earthquake also disrupted one of the area's most essential lifelines – water. Approximately 1,750 residents in affected areas rely on water catchment systems for their daily water



Damage to tanks disrupted a critical life-line for residents who rely on catchment systems for their water supply.
Photo: HIEMA

supply, and many of those systems were damaged during the earthquake.

"In case after case we saw residences that rely on catchment systems for household water where tank liners ripped, pipes broke, or other damage cut off water supply," said Adam Weintraub, staff officer with Hawai'i County Civil Defense. "It's a huge disruption in communities where more than 21 percent of the residents rely on catchment for their water at home."

In addition to damaged homes, the earthquake caused rockslides that temporarily closed portions of Highway 11 and left more than 1,300 utility customers without power immediately following the event.

For many residents, the greatest challenge has been what comes after the

earthquake. County surveys found that fewer than one percent of damaged homes carried earthquake insurance, leaving many families to face costly repairs with limited insurance coverage.

Nonprofit organizations and local agencies are working with victims to access temporary housing, financial assistance, and recovery resources. Some homeowners are staying with family or friends while they determine whether their homes can be repaired or must be rebuilt.

Agricultural surveys estimate more than \$423,000 in losses, of which nearly \$394,000 is attributed to damage to water systems and infrastructure. Hawai'i County has expanded access to emergency water fill stations and is delivering water to neighborhoods where many catchment systems remain unusable.

Although recovery will take time, the strength of Hawai'i's communities has been evident throughout the response. Organizations such as Vibrant Hawai'i, Catholic Charities, the American Red Cross, plus countless volunteers have helped residents with temporary housing, bottled water, financial assistance, and disaster case management.

Following the final damage assessment, HIEMA will explore federal assistance options for individual households and public infrastructure. In the meantime, local and state government remain committed to supporting impacted communities and helping families recover and rebuild.

Maui Milestone from front page

ing Lahaina's commercial district.

Mayor Richard T. Bissen, Jr. reflected on the project's broader significance, stating, "Today's project is more than the completion of a walkway and railing; it represents another meaningful step in creating the conditions for

business to reopen, local jobs to return and private investment to move forward."

The project included approximately 1,450 feet of sidewalk, and the replacement of roughly 700 feet of stainless-steel railing. Additional improvements included the installation of 12 light poles, 15 benches, five bike racks, and eight landscaping

planters including 13 milo trees and 'ākai ground cover. County officials also reported continued progress in Lahaina's economic recovery, with five commercial permits already issued and additional commercial properties moving through the permitting process.

Home hurricane hardening protects your house and saves you money

Guest column by Dennis Hwang,
University of Hawaii Sea Grant College
Program, NOAA

In 2026, four winter storms caused statewide wind and flood damage. A February 7–10 storm brought over 30 inches of rain to Hawai'i County and 60–70 mph gusts statewide. From March 10–24, two Kona Lows dropped over 30 inches on parts of O'ahu, Molo-ka'i, Maui, and Hawai'i County. Damage exceeded \$1 billion, with more than 1,200 homes affected.



Dennis Hwang is University of Hawai'i faculty and author of 'Homeowner's Handbook to Prepare for Natural Disasters'.

Hurricanes can cause far more damage through flooding, storm surge, and much stronger winds. During the 2026 winter storms, up to 100 O'ahu properties reported roof damage, but even a minimal hurricane could damage many thousands of homes. Strong El Niño conditions this summer may raise hurricane risk by warming storm-fueling waters. The last strong El Niño, in 2015, produced a record 16 Pacific tropical cyclones, all of which missed the state.

Hawai'i residents can use

tips in the *Homeowner's Handbook to Prepare for Natural Hazards* to gather their 14-day food and water supply while reducing space and cost requirements, create science-based hurricane emergency/evacuation plans, and strengthen homes.

For the home, start with basic maintenance to reduce high-wind, flood, and even wildfire risk: remove debris, loose objects, gutter vegetation that blocks drainage, and dead vegetation that can burn. Check for termite damage, corroded fasteners, and wood rot, and maintain a 5-foot non-combustible perimeter to reduce wildfire threats.

Hurricane ties connect roofs to walls to prevent roof fly-off and are a very cost-effective retrofit for older homes. With guidance from a licensed architect or engineer, a handy homeowner can complete the work for about \$400 in materials, or hire a licensed contractor for about \$2,500. Depending on the insurer, discounts may reach 10%, saving more than \$200 per year. More than 8,000 homes statewide

have been retrofitted with roof-to-wall ties.

Broken windows can admit rain, debris, and wind, increasing the risk of roof-liftoff. Use plywood, storm panels, or impact-resistant windows. The *Homeowner's Handbook* lists ten options. Window protection may qualify for 15–18% discounts on



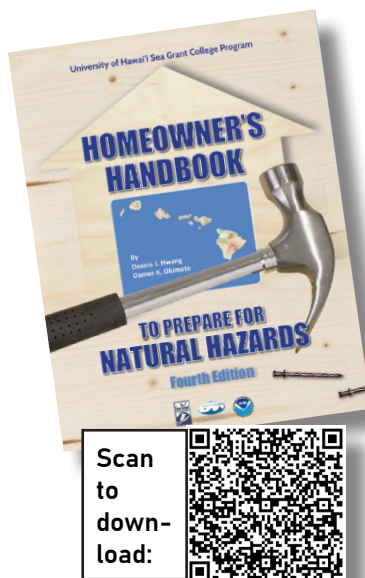
This home on O'ahu lost its roof in the February 2026 Super Bowl weekend storm with sustained winds of 30 to 40 miles per hour. Installing hurricane ties (seen below) likely would have prevented this damage. Photos courtesy Dennis Hwang



hurricane insurance and foundation upgrades may qualify for 10–12%.

When reroofing, use ring shank nails, seal roof deck joints, and choose shingles rated for hurricanes (ASTM D7158 Class H), fire resistance (UL Class A), and heat reduction. These upgrades may add 10% to costs but are worthwhile since they help protect occupants.

Every home has residual risk, so carry hurricane insurance. Consider flood insurance if you are in an A or V flood zone or have flooded before. Homeowner's insurance is needed to cover wildfire risks and non-hurricane wind damage, such as the March Kona Lows. Coverage cannot be obtained during an incoming event.



Scan
to
down-
load:



Honolulu DEM debuts new preparedness tool: O'ahu Hazard Explorer

O'ahu residents have a new tool to help them assess and better understand the hazard risks they face at home, work, and school—the O'ahu Hazard Explorer.

This new interactive mapping tool developed by Honolulu DEM lets residents see whether a location is in a tsunami evacuation zone, flood zone, wildfire risk area, or dam/levee evacuation area—all in one map.

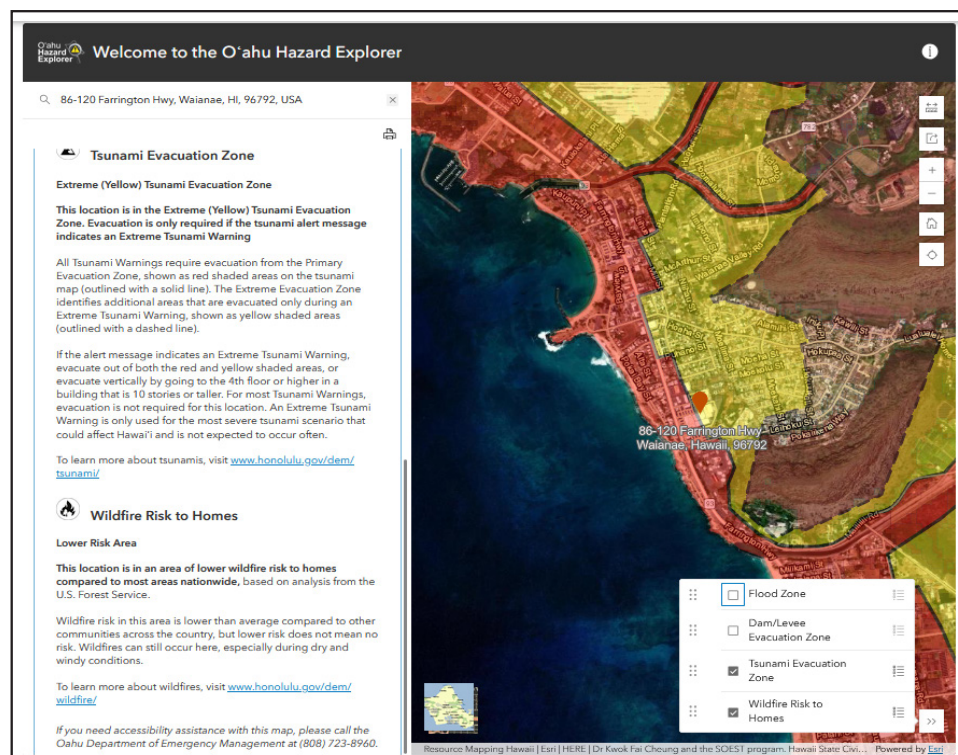


“Previously, residents often had to consult multiple websites to find hazard information for different locations and hazards,” said Jennifer Walter, Deputy Director of the Department of Emergency Management.

Residents are encouraged to use the O'ahu Hazard Explorer to help them build

or update their own emergency plans. Visit honolulu.gov/myhazards for more information.

The O'ahu Hazard Explorer does not display real-time hazard risk or provide notification during emergencies. Sign up for alerts at hnlalert.gov.



Stormy Weather BOOK CLUB

SS Edmund Fitzgerald: How a tragic sinking led to systemic change

'The Gales of November: The Untold Story of the Edmund Fitzgerald' by John U. Bacon

Recommendation by **Jacob Bateman**,
HIEMA Operations Specialist Chief

Administrator Lopez, in his introductory meetings over the last week, emphasized the importance of HIEMA responding to immediate needs while making an effort to recognize and address the systemic and historical problems that drive them.

In “The Gales of November,” jour-

nalist John U. Bacon examines the sinking of the freight ship *Edmund Fitzgerald* during a major storm on Lake Superior in 1975, which tragically claimed the 29 lives of its crew.

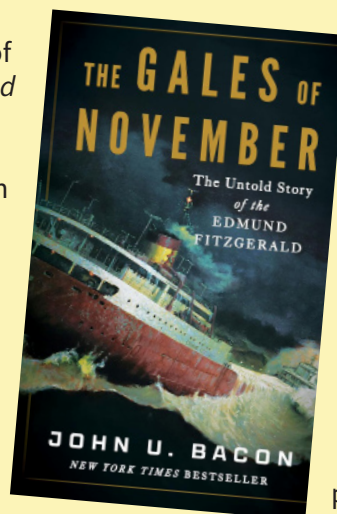
I’ll admit I didn’t read this book thinking about work, but on further review, I think it speaks to that philosophy.

The immediate need: A ship is lost in a powerful storm.

The immediate solution: Search and rescue (unsuccessful).

The big picture: The actual cause of the sinking is still unknown, but regulations that were enacted in the following years can give us an idea of some of the systemic issues that contributed to the tragedy, and how future accidents will be prevented.

1. Maximum loads were reduced to



allow ships to sit higher, and limits were more strictly enforced.

2. Weather data gathering, tracking, and forecasting improved significantly.

3. Ship tracking and emergency broadcast/beacon technologies received large investments and became standard.

Since 1975, there have been no other sinkings of major commercial freighters in the Great Lakes. Addressing systemic issues prevented further mishaps.

Similarly, HIEMA must look for the big picture when we respond to disasters. The more we can do to recognize and address the core issues that lead to requests for assistance, the fewer requests for assistance we will receive. We will have more breathing room to focus on other issues, and the counties and communities we support will be stronger and more self-sufficient.

Kaua'i mitigation plan outlines 40 project actions

The Kaua'i Emergency Management Agency released its 2026 update to the Kaua'i Multi-Hazard Mitigation and Resilience Plan on June 15, with an updated hazard risk ranking and outlines for 40 hazard mitigation actions.

"This plan is a cornerstone of the work that emergency managers do to reduce the risk and harm from known natural hazards, such as hurricanes, wildfires, flooding and tsunamis," said Elton Ushio, KEMA administrator. "Mahalo to all our partners, which include the Planning Department, Office of Economic Development, SWCA Environmental Consultants, University of Hawai'i and KEMA."

Planners incorporated over eight months of public comment solicitation. Last updated in 2021, this regular 5-year update was reviewed by the Kaua'i Mayor's Office, HIEMA and FEMA. FEMA approved it on May 22. FEMA's approval qualifies the county for federal hazard mitigation grants.

The plan ranks the following disasters as the top risks to Kaua'i:

1. Wildfire
2. Tropical cyclone and other high winds
3. Tsunami
4. Landslide
5. Drought
6. Inland flood
7. High surf, coastal flood, erosion and sea level rise
8. Dam failure
9. Heat
10. Earthquake

Community emergency response team (CERT) classes on O'ahu and Hawai'i Island

CERT training courses are free of charge and open to the public in Honolulu and Kailua-Kona. Community members learn basic disaster response skills to protect themselves, their families and their communities during an emergency.



A planned high-wind retrofit of Kaua'i War Memorial Convention Hall in Līhu'e will enable its use as a best available refuge area. Photo courtesy County of Kaua'i

The full 556-page [plan](#), including explanation of methodologies, meeting notes and public comments, is available at www.kauai.gov/kema.

Planners recommended 40 actions to mitigate the risk to these natural hazards. "High priority" actions include:

- Assess and plan for **hardening critical county infrastructure** and vulnerable life-lines, focusing on the elements most at risk from natural hazard.
- **Identify refuge locations** in new and existing buildings and pursue funding for retrofit of identified shortcomings to ensure refuge areas are ready for use.
- **Strengthen Līhu'e Civic Center and Kaua'i Police Department emergency power and IT systems** by ensuring continued county operations, response, and recovery services post-disaster, upgrading generators, transfer switches, and electrical components.
- **Emergency generators for Department of Water pump stations** to operate during periods of power loss.
- **Hurricane-resistant doors for eight Kaua'i Fire Department stations.**
- **Levee and dam inspection, repair and maintenance.**

Honolulu (3 Saturdays)—Honolulu Department of Emergency Management (DEM):

Sept. 12 and 19, 8 am – 4 pm at DEM Emergency Operations Center

Sept. 26, 7:30 am – 2 pm at Diamond Head

Oct. 17 and 24, 8 am – 4 pm at DEM EOC

Oct. 31, 7:30 am – 2 pm at Diamond Head

Sign up at honolulu.gov/dem or contact Jeff Spencer at jspencer1@honolulu.gov for more info.

Watershed and community flood drainage assessment.

- Analyze and mitigate against **National Flood Insurance Program repetitive loss** and severe repetitive loss properties.
- Implement priority projects and actions from **2024 Kaua'i Community Wildfire Protection Plan**, and other wildfire mitigation activities.
- Integrate new equipment to **increase wildfire fighting capability.**
- High-wind **retrofit of Kaua'i War Memorial Convention Hall**, to be used as a best available refuge area.
- Identify **landslide risk areas** and mitigation strategies.
- Assess **water scarcity** needs and implement plans for water and wastewater critical infrastructure and life-lines.
- Implement **floodplain management** programs.
- Reestablish **Waimea River levee** and **Hanapēpē River levee** accreditation and coverage under National Flood Insurance Program.

Kailua-Kona—Hawai'i County Civil Defense Agency:

Sept. 19 – 20, 8 am – 4:30 pm at West Hawai'i Civic Center, Kailua-Kona

- 16 hours of online training also required

Sign up by emailing cert@hawaiiicounty.gov or call (808) 935-0031 for more info.