



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

Laulima

Working Together

A Quarterly Newsletter for Our Partners and Community | 'Okakopa/October 2026

Administrator's Message

by David Lopez

Aloha,

As fall 2026 arrives, I am reflecting on the distinct disasters and recovery efforts that have overwhelmed our state: the Kona Low Storms, the South Kona earthquake, Hurricane Lala, Hurricane Lowell, Hurricane Nolo and the continuing recovery from the Maui wildfires. Each has tested this agency and communities across our state differently. Together, they remind us that resilience is not a single response; it is the work we do before, during, and long after an emergency.

From the Kona Lows through Lala and Lowell, county, state, and federal agencies, along with utility companies and community partners, helped people evacuate, find shelter and food, evaluate damages, and restore essential services. HIEMA coordinated with counties and FEMA on damage assessments. On Maui, joint housing efforts continue to support wildfire recovery.

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Photo: Staff Sgt. Mira Roman



Sacred work at Nā'ālehu Cemetery

*Editor's note: This article is an abridgement of a story published on DVIDS by Hawai'i State Department of Defense Public Affairs Specialist **Rachel Blaire**.*

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When Hurricane Lala brought destructive weather to Hawai'i Island

in August, communities across the island faced heavy rainfall, flooding, damaging winds, landslides, and widespread debris. In the Ka'ū District, the storm caused significant damage to roads, property, infrastructure, and

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Kapa'a United Church of Christ became a community center for food, emotional support and medical care in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Lowell. Full photo on page 6.

On Kaua'i, food pantries became central hubs after Hurricane Lowell

In the aftermath of Hurricane Lowell, Kōkua Kapa'a, a community assistance program and weekly food pantry operating in partnership with Ho'okipa Kaua'i and the Kapa'a United Church of Christ, has been helping neighbors meet immediate needs, offering a place to talk through what comes next. For people dealing with storm damage or displacement, a pantry visit can mean more than groceries. It can also be a chance to connect with someone ready to listen.

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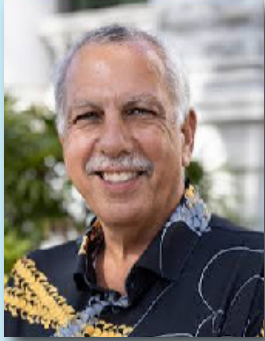
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Hawai'i Island

The eye of Hurricane Lala passed just off South Point on Aug. 16, causing floods and downing trees island-wide,



Darryl Oliveira, HCCDA

but especially in south and west Hawai'i Island. Several residents died as a direct or indirect result of the storm. Parts of Ka'u were isolated by flood damage to roads; some areas still lack

water service months later.

Around-the-clock efforts by the Department of Public Works, State Department of Transportation and National Guard rebuilt a stretch of Highway 11 within days, restoring access to Ka'u Hospital.

Many of the communities hardest hit were still recovering from the May 22 earthquake in South Kona.

Civil Defense continues to coordinate with county, state, federal and private sector partners to recover and identify elements swept by floodwaters from graves at cemeteries in Nā'ālehu.

Recovery efforts continue in October, with Community Resource Center sites connecting residents with help for earthquake damage, and housing and other assistance managed by Vibrant Hawai'i for those displaced by Lala.

Maui, Moloka'i & Lāna'i

Aloha mai kākou,

July marked a significant milestone for MEMA as we blessed our new Maui Emergency Operations Center on July 23, with my father, Frank Kawaikapu Hewett, leading the blessing. The following day, we welcomed our partners

into the space and introduced it to the community.

The 9,355-square-foot facility accommodates up to 198 personnel, compared with 52 in our former EOC. We are transitioning into this new space with state-of-the-art technology to strengthen emergency coordination and situational awareness.



Amos Lonokailua-Hewett, MEMA

growing into land, layer by layer. Similarly, MEMA continues to grow, building upon the work of those who came before us, strengthening partnerships and learning through back-to-back emergency activations.

As we enter this new chapter, we also welcome Francis Kau as our new deputy administrator, strengthening our leadership team. Francis comes to us with a wealth of knowledge and experience.

Our kuleana remains unchanged: to serve and protect Maui Nui.

When on Maui, we welcome our emergency management partners to visit our new EOC.

Mahalo, a e mālama pono.

O'ahu

The City and County of Honolulu Department of Emergency Management (O'ahu DEM) remained active in recent months, supporting response and recovery efforts across the state.

During Hurricane Lowell, O'ahu DEM assisted Kaua'i County and its emergency management partners. Recent O'ahu Emergency Operations Center (EOC) activations included Tropical Storm Lala, Hurricane Lowell, an October Flash Flood Warning, and the Pearl City junkyard fire.



Randal Collins, DEM

As hurricane season continues through November 30, residents are encouraged to sign up for HNL Alert, O'ahu's notification system, review emergency plans, and maintain supplies for at least 14 days. With Hawai'i's wet season approaching, now is the time to prepare for heavy rain and flooding, clear storm drains, and monitor weather alerts.

O'ahu DEM extends a heartfelt mahalo to our government partners, first responders, community organizations, and residents for their participation and support in recent months. Strong partnerships and prepared communities

Kaua'i

Aloha from Kaua'i!

Hurricane Lowell tested our island, and our community answered with resilience and aloha. As recovery continues, Solomon Kanoho has transitioned from KEMA Executive Officer to the County's



Elton Ushio, KEMA

Local Disaster Recovery and Mitigation Manager, coordinating recovery efforts across departments and partner agencies.

We extend heartfelt mahalo to

Governor Josh Green, the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency, the Hawai'i National Guard, Kaua'i Island Utility Cooperative, and our government and community partners. Most of all, mahalo to our friends, family, and neighbors who looked out for one another.

On October 12–13, National Hurricane Center specialists visited Kaua'i to observe Lowell's coastal damage, examine how wave runup contributed to inundation, and discuss improvements to storm surge products and services.

Hurricane season continues through November 30. Please restock emergency kits, review family plans, and follow official information.

KEMA remains committed to resilience through preparedness, coordination, and shared kuleana.

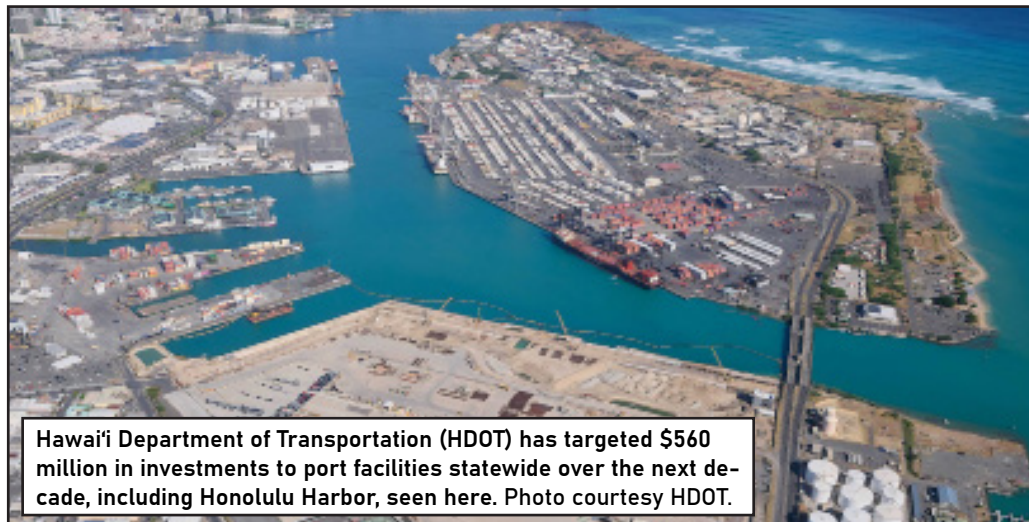
Securing Hawai'i's lifeline: Resilience is top priority at Honolulu Harbor

As the Hawaiian Islands rely on imports for 85 percent of our food and essential goods, Hawai'i's economy and supply chain depend entirely on Honolulu Harbor. Serving as the central hub of our state's hub-and-spoke commercial ports system, Honolulu Harbor is the beating heart that keeps local businesses running and communities supplied every single day.

In the face of this year's Kona Low storms, active hurricane season and other extreme weather, the Hawai'i Department of Transportation (HDOT) has emphasized that its highest priority for the state's ports is ensuring uninterrupted operations and rapid recovery, especially at Honolulu Harbor.

Over the next decade, HDOT will invest \$560 million at facilities statewide to ensure piers and wharves are built to withstand changing sea conditions and wave-induced erosion, cargo yards have adequate drainage and aren't susceptible to flooding, and terminals are right-sized to support optimized and efficient operations for the cargo volumes to meet the needs of our economy. For Honolulu Harbor, building port resilience continues with the \$2.5 billion redevelopment of Sand Island Container Terminal featuring a re-constructed and elevated wharf. These critical infrastructure upgrades facilitate a highly resilient port system with the seamless movement of goods from ship to shore to store reducing impacts to consumers in communities.

HDOT continuously evaluates and trains for high-stakes emergency

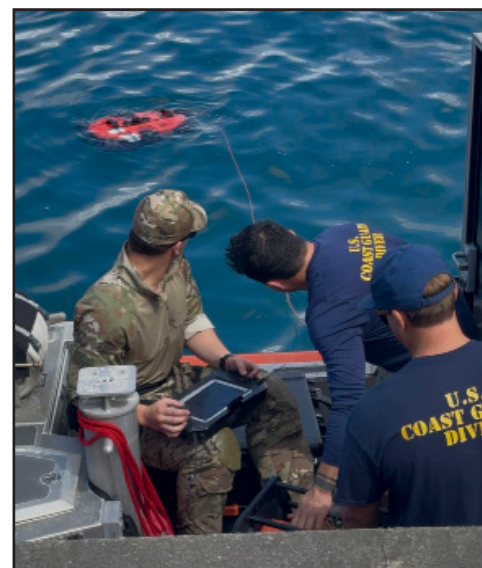


Hawai'i Department of Transportation (HDOT) has targeted \$560 million in investments to port facilities statewide over the next decade, including Honolulu Harbor, seen here. Photo courtesy HDOT.

scenarios — including blocked channels or terminals, compromised infrastructure, entrance obstructions and power grid failures — to prepare tools and strategies to maintain our critical supply chain. For example, if the Kapālama Channel or Sand Island Container Terminal is obstructed, cargo operations seamlessly shift to Piers 1, 19/20, and 29. Similarly, if the port entrance is blocked, vessels under 738 feet can divert to Kalaeloa Barbers Point Harbor.

Beyond emergency response plans, HDOT actively builds long-term resilience to protect waterways and infrastructure. Recent proactive measures include removing inoperable vessels, enforcing evacuation orders with penalties, acquiring advanced assessment tools like side-scan sonar and drones, and reinforcing partnerships with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and U.S. Navy for rapid post-event salvage and debris clearance.

Currently, 100 percent of all overseas cargo is discharged in Honolulu, with 70 percent staying on O'ahu and 30 percent transshipped to neighbor islands. Honolulu Harbor is uniquely equipped to handle this immense volume. No other harbor possesses the necessary cargo-handling equipment, labor force, or expansion capacity.



U.S. Coast Guard personnel deploy an underwater drone in Honolulu Harbor as part of a multi-agency hurricane port drill in May. Photo by HIEMA.

A viable alternate port would require an estimated 80 acres of new cargo yard to be built along with cargo handling equipment and the workforce to operate it. Investing in the structural resilience, technology, and emergency preparedness of Honolulu Harbor is the most effective way to safeguard Hawai'i's economic future and ensure our supply chain remains unbreakable.

Administrator's Message from page 1

No single agency can do this work alone. I am grateful to the county teams who know their communities, to state and federal colleagues who bring critical capabilities, and to nonprofits, businesses, and residents who turn care into action.

Our state's resilience lives in that shared commitment. We will continue to listen, strengthen our partnerships, and help families prepare for and recover from challenges. Across our islands, that spirit gives us strength daily. It is through our collective efforts and dedication to one another that we build a more resilient state. Together,

let's embrace the idea of personal responsibility in our recovery efforts and support one another, ensuring that we are all actively participating in our own rescue and the well-being of our communities.



Students from American Samoa Community College's Inclusive Emergency Management program visit HIEMA headquarters at Diamond Head. Photo: HIEMA

College program in American Samoa educating future emergency managers

Students from American Samoa Community College (ASCC) visited the Hawai'i Emergency Management Agency (HIEMA) in August to gain insight

and information about Hawai'i's approach to emergency management and to glean knowledge from HIEMA personnel.

The students are studying emergency management through ASCC's Inclusive Emergency Management program, which provides practical training and real-world experience as well as a comprehensive education background to integrate equity and inclusion in emergency management. Students not only learn the principles,

history, and structure of emergency management, but also how to incorporate and accommodate the needs of their communities as part of their emergency management planning.

HIEMA staff met with the group and provided background on the agency and its functions during emergencies, fielding questions from the students on various aspects of emergency management, from operations and logistics to cultural and social concerns.

At the end of their visit, the students had a surprise in store for their HIEMA hosts: a thank-you gift of song. It was a beautiful "chicken skin" ending to a visit that showed emergency management isn't only about planning, preparedness, and disasters, but also about connections with people, communities, and colleagues.

North Shore prep event Oct. 24

Government agencies, nonprofits and community groups host the annual North Shore Disaster Prep event Saturday, Oct. 24, from 9 a.m. to noon at Waialua Community Association, 66-434 Kamehameha Hwy., Hale'iwa.

Stormy Weather BOOK CLUB

'Disasterology' explores extreme weather trends and the systems we use to manage its impacts

'Disasterology: Dispatches from the Frontlines of the Climate Crisis' by Dr. Samantha Montano

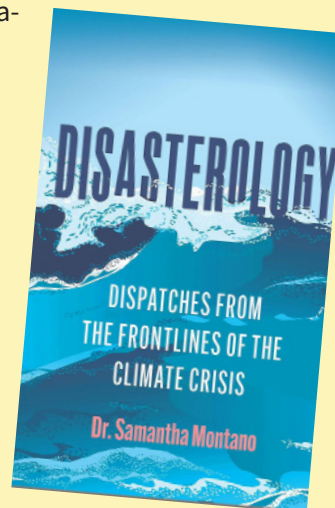
Recommendation by **Patrick Daley**,
HIEMA Public Information Specialist

Dr. Samantha Montano calls herself a "disasterologist," which is her elevator pitch for an emergency manager (EM). As an EM communications professional who strives for simple and memorable messaging in a field of endless acronyms and industry jargon,

I support this simplification!

Montano's clever and direct language characterize *Disasterology*, a study of the modern climate crisis, the natural disasters borne of it and our EM system response. As a millennial, I connected with growing up during 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina. Montano shares her experience as a high school volunteer and later a resident in New Orleans during the aftermath of Katrina, a catastrophe that led to the overhaul of our EM system. From her graduate studies, she details other modern examples of climate change disasters and our way of managing them. Montano's exploration of vulnerable populations and their disproportionate suffering during disasters is exceptional.

While Montano's writing comes across



as passionate, frustrated and sometimes political, her research is admirable, with over 500 footnotes and citations in the book.

Here in Hawai'i, we are in the midst of an incredible hurricane season driven by sea surface temperatures over six degrees warmer than usual. We have dangerous droughts exacerbated by heat that have led to devastating wildfires. Climate change is literally at our doorstep. This extreme weather has destroyed communities and taken lives.

I know that we must be realistic; as humans (and emergency managers) we are at the mercy of the earth. The most robust posture of personnel and equipment cannot match the immense power of nature. But we must be relentless in mitigating threats, protecting our lifelines and strengthening our response capabilities. We are in a tumultuous environment and the outlook for extreme weather is worrying.

MEMA opens new Maui EOC in major expansion effort

Maui Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) is transitioning to its new Maui Emergency Operations Center (MEOC) in Wailuku and expects to be fully operational there this month. With just under 9,000 square feet, MEMA's new MEOC nearly quadruples personnel capacity from 52 to 198. MEMA itself has 31 funded positions, up from nine positions when Administrator Amos Lonokailua-Hewett first signed on to lead MEMA in January 2024. The development of the new MEOC began in 2020 when the previous county administration purchased the property.

"This day is the result of many years of hard work by many people," Lonokailua-Hewett said during the MEOC blessing on July 24.

"I am grateful to everyone who helped move this project forward. Many hands, across different administrations, departments and agencies, helped bring us to this moment. Our MEMA team understands the kuleana we have to serve our community. We will continue working every day to strengthen preparedness and help protect the people of Maui Nui."

The MEOC's central operations room is equipped with a 24-display video wall and several dozen workstations where MEMA staff, emergency responders and government partners

can view important information in one place, understand what is happening in real time and make faster decisions, said a press release from the County of Maui.

"The opportunity for enhanced situational awareness through advanced technology" has been a significant benefit for MEMA, said MEMA External Affairs Officer Eden Keolani Stewart.

MEMA upgraded its mission-critical technology tools in its new MEOC, with advanced audio and visual systems, video processing, backup systems, and communications and video conferencing systems to foster high-level, 24/7 emergency operations. MEOC systems were adaptably designed to be able to incorporate new technology developments.

Since Lonokailua-Hewett's arrival, MEMA has strengthened organizational capacity by tripling its staff size and expanding its finance, hazard mitigation and external affairs sections. MEMA also dedicated staff to remote communities of Lānaʻi, Molokaʻi and Hāna.

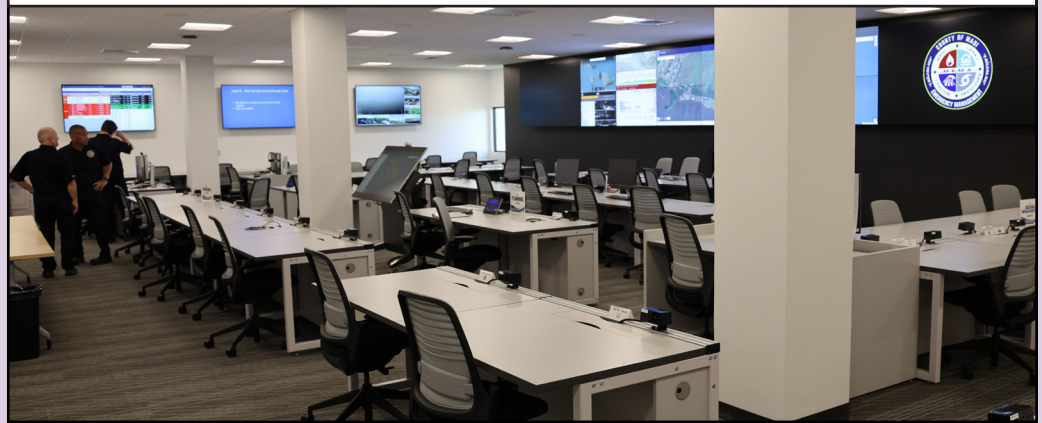
With expanded manpower in recent years, MEMA is nearing completion of

46 emergency plans, expanded staff and community trainings, upgraded technology for early warning and situational awareness, broadened publicity efforts and increased community events, and bolstered mitigation efforts for wildfire and flooding.

Since 2024, MEMA has had 92 emergency activations: 20 in 2024, 45 in 2025, and 27 in the first half of 2026.



Above: MEMA Administrator Amos Lonokailua-Hewett speaks at the blessing of the new MEOC. **Below:** The central operations room houses a 24-display video wall and several dozen personnel workstations. Photos: Eden K. Stewart and County of Maui.



Kauaʻi food pantry - from page 1

In the days after Lowell's destructive impacts, 195 people shopped for groceries at Kōkua Kapaʻa, and more than 300 meals were served. Michael Keiser, who helps with the pantry, says a typical shopper receives about 35 pounds of groceries. Additionally, volunteers repaired six bicycles and gave three used bicycles to people who needed them. Michael, a primary care provider who offers mobile medical

care at four food pantries, saw nine patients that day.

Those numbers tell only part of the story. Michael also describes many conversations, emotional support, and kōkua for neighbors affected by storm damage and displacement. The pantry offered people a place to share what they were experiencing while receiving practical assistance.

Michael says the effects of Lowell have been visible across the pantry network. At another pantry he attends on Wednesdays, he estimates that attendance rose from the

usual 70 to 100 people to well over 400 after the storm. He says attendance at Kōkua Kapaʻa was about 30% above its usual level. The increase meant more neighbors turning to pantry volunteers for help.

Kōkua Kapaʻa grew from a church-supported idea for a weekly food pantry. Michael says the congregation was nearly unanimous in its support. Most of the original volunteers were church members; today,

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Kaua'i food pantry - from page 1

volunteers also come from the wider community. Some are experiencing houselessness themselves, yet continue to serve their neighbors.

The pantry is connected to Ho'opiapa Kaua'i, a nonprofit in Princeville that has run its own pantry for years. Under the leadership of Ron and Ann Garrison, Michael says, the organization helped start three other weekly pantries on Kaua'i's east side. It also operates a mobile grocery trailer that travels to the west side three or more times a week. These efforts bring food closer to people across the island.

Michael joined the work by helping procure food and set up a weekly pantry. At the same time, he hoped to bring healthcare to people who were houseless, had limited resources, or were otherwise hard to reach. The Hawai'i Health Systems Corporation offered him a role combining primary care in a rural health clinic with medical service to underserved patients.



Community members came together at Kōkua Kapa'a after Hurricane Lowell. L to R: Savannah, Kristal, Michael, Cherlee, Koa, Blue and Uncle Bob (aka Bicycle Bob). Photo: Michael Keiser

After nearly three years, Michael says he has been given the opportunity to expand that work.

He credits the people who have supported and made his service possible. After Lowell, that spirit of shared service was

visible in every grocery distribution, meal, bicycle repair, medical visit, and conversation. For neighbors navigating recovery, Kōkua Kapa'a remains a place to find practical help - and people ready to listen.

Nā'ālehu Cemetery - from page 1

areas of deep cultural importance. Among the locations severely affected was Nā'ālehu Cemetery, where powerful floodwaters disturbed burial sites and carried human remains and cemetery materials beyond the cemetery grounds.

What followed was a sensitive and complex recovery effort focused not only on restoring the affected area, but also on treating the deceased, their families, and the surrounding community with dignity and respect.

The Hawai'i National Guard joined Hawai'i County, cultural practitioners, archaeologists, forensic specialists, and other subject matter experts to carefully locate, document, and recover displaced remains. By September 1, more than 140 remains had been identified in the Nā'ālehu area, with recovery operations continuing as teams carefully searched areas affected by flooding, landslides, and debris.

Members of the Hawai'i National Guard's 93rd Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Enhanced Response Force Package brought specialized capabilities to the mission.

Their training allowed personnel to safely work through unstable terrain and debris while conducting the careful search and recovery process required at the site.

The operation also demonstrated that disaster recovery in Hawai'i extends beyond repairing damaged roads, restoring utilities, and clearing debris. Protecting cultural resources and respecting the traditions and values of affected communities are equally important parts of helping communities recover.

Before recovery work began, coordination took place with community representatives and local responders to ensure personnel understood the cultural significance of the cemetery and had authorization to enter sensitive areas. Cultural practitioners remained an important part of the process throughout the mission. An opening ceremony and blessing were conducted before operations began, recognizing the sacred nature of the work ahead. When remains were located, cultural practitioners were provided an opportunity to conduct appropriate practices and pay respects before recovery and transportation occurred. A closing ceremony was also held following operations.

The effort brought together personnel and expertise from multiple organizations, including support and guidance from the Maui Department of 'Ōiwi Resources and the Hawai'i State Department of Health. Areas associated with displaced burials were also protected from general debris removal while recovery operations continued.

For Hawai'i's emergency management community, the response at Nā'ālehu Cemetery serves as an important reminder that disasters affect much more than physical infrastructure. They can impact history, culture, families, and places that communities have cared for across generations.

Through cooperation among government agencies, the Hawai'i National Guard, cultural practitioners, technical experts, and the community, the Nā'ālehu recovery effort reflected a shared commitment to mālama. Even in the aftermath of a devastating storm, the mission remained centered on compassion, cultural respect, and providing dignity and closure to the families and community affected by Hurricane Lala.