



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

Laulima

Working Together

A Quarterly Newsletter for Our Partners and Community | Iulai/July 2025



Photo: University of Hawai'i

UH's landmark Maui wildfire health study reports new findings

Researchers with disciplines in health and economics at the University of Hawai'i's Economic Research Organization (UHRO) have released new findings from its Maui Wildfire Exposure Study (MauiWES) that launched in January 2024. The

Continued on page 3



Neighborhood groups are on the front lines of fire defense

After a New Year's firework ignited their hillside in 2024, neighbors in Papakōlea on O'ahu united to make their community more fire resistant through the Hawai'i Firewise program. Story on Page 5.



Photo: Tyler Shortt/Kaheāwai Media

Administrator's Message

By James DS. Barros

This issue of Laulima is all about people working together, on many different levels – from neighbors in Papakōlea to federal service members on Kaua'i, from health providers and researchers on Maui to the new director of emergency management in Honolulu. Even our Stormy Weather Book Club has stories from the White House Situation Room to first responders in a small town in Wisconsin.

We say it all the time, because it's true: **Preparedness is a kākou effort!**

At HIEMA, we recently completed our Makani Pāhili hurricane simu-



lation exercise, with more than 25 organizations coming together over several days. This is a crucial undertaking that tests our emergency response. We are coming into summer, with threats of hurricanes and wildfire. Our lead story shows how you can help defend against fires. We must be vigilant during this dry season – almost all fires in Hawai'i are started by humans. Mahalo for your help!

Stormy Weather BOOK CLUB

What happens in the White House Situation Room during times of crisis, and a first responder's experiences in his rural Wisconsin town

See page 6 for our Book Club reviews

Hawai'i Island

Aloha, friends. The Kīlauea eruption cycle has continued through the spring and early summer, with lava fountains reaching up to 1,200 feet, thrilling visitors and kama'āina alike. While the dramatic displays have caused some traffic hitches in and around Hawai'i



Talmadge Magno, HCCDA

Volcanoes National Park, the eruptions have remained safely in the summit area.

The start of hurricane season brought together the county's leadership team for an exercise to test our plans for continuity of government and operations during a simulated hurricane as part of the annual Makani Pāhili drill.

Continuing our preparedness efforts, more than 70 licensed amateur radio operators gathered June 12 in Hilo for the first-ever Keanakolu Auxiliary Communications (AuxComm) Summit, hosted by Civil Defense. The event was part of our effort to deepen our partnership with the ham radio community to further develop the county's Auxiliary Communications program. Our AuxComm partners are a crucial backup network when a disaster disrupts communications on Hawai'i Island, helping to deliver vital information to and from "the last person, in the last home, on the last block." Follow-up events, training, and installation of radio repeaters are planned.

Maui, Moloka'i & Lāna'i

Aloha mai kākou—

Since our last update in April, MEMA continues to strengthen our response and outreach efforts. Our EOC was activated for the Kahikinui Fire that began June 16.

We used the Genasys Protect evacuation app to issue advisories and evacuation orders in coordination with MPD and MFD. We continue



Amos Lonokailua-Hewett, MEMA

to share PSAs about Genasys Protect and MEMA Alerts through our website, social media, radio, cable TV, and QR codes at Kahului Airport to keep kama'āina and visitors informed.

Community outreach remains a cornerstone of our mission. We welcomed a Community Outreach Specialist focused on vulnerable populations, including kūpuna, along with an Accounts Clerk, GIS Analyst, and Documentation Unit Leader. Our CERT program has been revitalized with the hiring of a new CERT Coordinator. This month, we supported a Teen CERT course and hosted both a Basic CERT and a CERT Training of Trainers course.

As hurricane season continues, our message to the community is: "E ho'omākaukau kākou a e mālama pono."

O'ahu

With hurricane season upon us, O'ahu Department of Emergency Management is busy doing everything we can to make sure the



Randal Collins, DEM

City and County and our partners are ready to action when a storm is forecast. From practicing our hurricane plans during the annual Makani Pāhili exercise to engaging the public one-on-one at events to promote community preparedness, DEM continues

to do everything we can to help everyone on O'ahu be prepared.

Preparedness is a kākou effort – it takes all of us working together! If we all make efforts to be as prepared as we can be, we can help free up resources to assist those who do not have the resources or ability to prepare.

A few things to do before today, when there isn't a storm forecast:

- Make a plan: Know where you will shelter during a storm. Make sure everyone in the family knows the plan!
- Build a kit: Buy your supplies and home protection items before the pre-storm rush on stores.
- Stay informed: Make sure you know where to get official information in an emergency. Sign up for HNL Alert and follow O'ahu DEM on social media.

Everyone is a partner in emergency preparedness! Mahalo for taking this kuleana seriously and help to protect your friends, neighbors, and all of O'ahu.

Kaua'i

Aloha from Kaua'i!

As we move deeper into hurricane season, KEMA continues to focus on



Elton Ushio, KEMA

preparedness, partnerships, and planning. We're actively working on the 2026 update of our Multi-Hazard Mitigation and Resilience Plan – our guiding document for reducing risk from disasters

like hurricanes, floods, and wildfires. Community input will be a key part of this process, and we look forward to engaging with residents in the months ahead.

In preparation for hurricane season, KEMA met with major telecommunications providers to strengthen coordination and ensure readiness. We also ramped up community outreach efforts – mahalo to all participating stakeholders and partners who helped us spread the word on preparedness!

On the training and exercise front, KEMA participated in and supported the Lihue Airport Triennial Exercise, a multi-agency U.S. Coast Guard Search and Rescue Exercise, and a Wildfire Tabletop Exercise with Kaua'i Fire Department and key Emergency Operations Center partners, as well as the Makani Pāhili 2025 hurricane exercise. We also hosted an ArcGIS training to enhance our mapping and situational awareness capabilities.

Mahalo to our team, partners, and community for continuing to strengthen our island's resilience.

'Kauai Cyber Mission' ran county networks through gauntlet

The County of Kaua'i conducted its first-ever cybersecurity-focused mission under the U.S. Department of Defense's Innovative Readiness Training (IRT) program—bringing military cyber experts to the island to help strengthen the county's digital defenses.

Over two weeks in May, 51 service members from 18 units worked alongside the County's Information Technology Division, Kaua'i Emergency Management Agency (KEMA), and the Kaua'i Police Department (KPD) to identify vulnerabilities, conduct real-time assessments, and simulate cyberattack scenarios.

"This groundbreaking mission put cybersecurity front and center," said Mayor Derek S.K. Kawakami. "We know that in today's world, protecting our community also means protecting our systems. Mahalo to our partners at the Department of Defense, our county team, and all who supported this important effort."



51 service members joined Kaua'i county personnel for the Kaua'i Cyber Mission.

The mission featured internal risk assessments, phishing simulations, incident response drills, and tabletop exercises designed to test countywide coordination in the event of a cyber threat. The visiting IRT team also provided customized training modules and recommendations to strengthen long-term cyber resilience.

"Our department is always planning for the worst to protect our residents," said KEMA Administrator Elton Ushio. "This mission gave us the opportunity to apply that same mindset to our digital systems. It was a valuable investment in our preparedness."

The Kaua'i Police Department collaborated on cybercrime awareness briefings, while the county's IT Division led efforts to implement technical improvements and reinforce best practices.

Kaua'i is one of the first counties in the nation to participate in a cybersecurity-specific IRT mission—highlighting its commitment to innovation and interagency readiness.

For more information about the Innovative Readiness Training program, visit irt.defense.gov.

Maui health study—continued from page 1

study is the first of its size and breadth in examining the effects of wildfire exposure, and has gained a national following as Californians recover from a wildfire that burned 57,000 acres in the Los Angeles metropolitan area.

The latest MauiWES report, released on June 18, suggests persistent, serious health issues in participants, with gradual trends towards recovery. The study incorporates data from 2,000 respondents. For the first time, the report includes a cohort of 200 children.

"We are into a very uncharted territory in terms of health impact," says Dr. Ruben Juarez, an economist who leads the study with Dr. Alika Maunakea, a biomedical scientist. "We are advising and collaborating with the response in Los Angeles to create a model that is replicable nationwide for future wildfire emergencies."

Key findings from the group of 1,800 adults include:

- 41% report worse health since the wildfire, down from 52% last year.
- 50% show symptoms of depression,

compared to 28% pre-wildfire.

- 26% report moderate or severe anxiety, compared to 1.6% pre-wildfire.
- 4.2% report seriously considering suicide, compared to 0.8% pre-wildfire.
- 74% have abnormal blood pressure (9% elevated; 43% Stage 1 hypertension; 21% Stage 2 hypertension), compared to 47% statewide (per Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

- 27% of participants show diminished lung function (baseline not established).

Key findings from the group of 200 children, ages 10 to 17, include (note that a baseline is not established):

- 51% show symptoms of depression (22% in the severe range; 29% in the mild to moderate range).
- 15% meet clinical levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- 30% screen positive for anxiety.
- 23% report low self-esteem.
- 38% have abnormal blood pressure (10%



elevated; 18% Stage 1 hypertension; 10% Stage 2 hypertension).

- 18% show impaired lung capacity.
- 43% show airway obstruction.

Social and economic findings from the group of 1,800 adults include:

- 41% live in temporary housing.
- 25% are unemployed.
- 61% feel high levels of support from family and friends.

The report includes data based on gender, race and ethnicity.

To read the full MauiWES report, visit www.mauiwes.info.

Meet Randal Collins, Honolulu DEM's new director

Dr. Randal Collins, CEM (certified emergency manager), was sworn in as the Director of Emergency Management for the City and County of Honolulu on May 1. He has held emergency management leadership roles at Neom, a planned smart city development in Saudi Arabia, and the cities of Indianapolis and El Segundo. Dr. Collins holds a doctorate in education from the University of Southern California, where his dissertation examined toxic leadership in emergency management. A Marine Corps veteran, he served for 12 years as a Staff Sergeant and Scout-Sniper Platoon Sergeant.

HIEMA: You have experience in emergency management, academia and the military. How would you describe your background and how it influences your current work?

Randal Collins: My background is grounded in three fields—military service, emergency management, and academia—all of which have significantly shaped my philosophy and practice.

The military gave me a foundation in discipline, planning, and operational coordination. It taught me the importance of readiness and precision under pressure.

Emergency management has given me the opportunity to apply those principles across local, state, national, and international levels. It's where I've learned how coordination, flexibility, and experience translate into practical outcomes for communities.

Academia has reinforced the value of evidence-based practice. It challenges me to examine assumptions, validate approaches with research, and mentor the next generation of leaders. Together, these fields influence how I approach complex challenges—with structure, experience, and a commitment to scientific integrity.

HIEMA: What is your evaluation of the emergency threats to Honolulu and



Dr. Randal Collins was sworn in on May 1 as Director of Emergency Management for the City and County of Honolulu. He previously held emergency management positions in Saudi Arabia; Indianapolis, IN and El Segundo, CA.

Hawai'i, from natural disasters to geopolitical issues or other vulnerabilities?

RC: Hawai'i and Honolulu face a wide range of emergency threats due to our geographic isolation, unique environment, and strategic location. The most significant threats include hurricanes, tsunamis, wildfires, and flooding. Our reliance on imported goods makes supply chain disruptions a critical vulnerability.

HIEMA: What is your vision for DEM? What are your short-term and long-term priorities?

RC: My vision for the Honolulu Department of Emergency Management is to build a world-class, adaptive emergency management agency that is fully prepared to protect O'ahu through any crisis.

In the short term, my priorities are to strengthen our emergency management capacity by increasing staff and securing a larger budget. We must be ready to meet the growing demands of disaster response and recovery, especially as FEMA shifts toward a retooled support model that places more responsibility on local jurisdictions. Honolulu must be ready to lead. I also intend to incorporate advanced technology, including artificial intelligence and machine learning, to enhance early warning systems and support real-time disaster preparedness and response.

Long term, I envision DEM operating from a new, state-of-the-art emergency operations center—built to support coordination, resilience, and innovation across all hazards.

HIEMA: What have you learned from your study and dissertation on toxic leadership in emergency management?

RC: My research into toxic leadership in emergency management revealed how damaging the wrong leadership style can be in high-stress, high-stakes environments. I found that toxic leaders often go unchecked because technical skill is valued over interpersonal effectiveness. This leads to a breakdown in trust, morale, and team performance—at exactly the time when cohesion is most critical.

I also learned that many emergency management organizations lack consistent processes for selecting and developing leaders. Without structured evaluation criteria and leadership development pipelines, poor leadership behaviors can persist and even be rewarded. The takeaway is clear: technical competence is not enough. We need to be intentional about who we promote, how we train them, and how we hold them accountable—especially in public safety roles where lives are on the line.

HIEMA: What motivates you to get up and go to work each day?

RC: I think I am just lucky that every day is a great day for disaster preparedness on O'ahu.

HIEMA: How are you finding life on O'ahu?

RC: Well, it is definitely different than Saudi Arabia! Instead of thobes [long, ankle-length robes], everyone is dressed in Aloha attire. I am also thankful it is not 125 degrees here! The scenery is beautiful as are the people.

Free courses in Kailua

Kailua Alert & Prepared and Texas A&M Engineering Extension offer two free public courses at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Kailua:

Disaster Preparedness and Survival: July 11, 6 – 9 p.m. and July 12, 8 a.m. – 6 p.m.

Wide Area Search: July 14-16, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. Sign up at www.kailuaalertprepared.org.

Fire experts: Residents have power to defend as dry season threatens

As Hawai'i enters dry season with a high wildfire risk, experts are urging residents to take action to prevent and protect against dangerous fires such as those that killed 102 people on Maui in August 2023. Recent studies from that fire and the destructive Los Angeles fires this year show that the most effective lines of defense are at local levels.

"The devastating fires across the country all underwent significant analysis," says Elizabeth Pickett, director of the Hawai'i Wildfire Management Organization (HWMO), revealing that fuels on individual properties – including building materials and vegetation in yards – "caused the fire to rapidly travel through neighborhoods."

"It was found that each house and the first five feet around it, if clean and free of combustibles," was the most effective way to protect that home from igniting, she says.

These findings have driven current efforts throughout the state, with organizations like HWMO and the Fire Safety Research Institute producing information on how residents can maintain and protect their homes.

"The most effective action the public can take is to maintain defensible space around homes and structures," says Fire Chief Kazuo Todd of the Hawai'i County Fire Department, "including clearing dry vegetation, trimming overhanging branches and removing flammable materials near buildings."

At hawaiiwildfire.org, HWMO provides in-depth guidance on everything from tree and shrub maintenance to home tips like using gutter guards and vent covers, selecting native plants to resist drought, and using fire-resistant construction materials.

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Neighbors in Hawai'i are organizing to protect their communities through programs such as Firewise USA, which guides communities through fire hazard assessments, action plans, risk reduction, work days and certification.



Photos courtesy Noel Shaw

Neighbors in Papakōlea join in to "Firewise" their community by cleaning out brush and other debris.

Noel Kaleikalaunuoka'ōia'i'o Shaw, who lives in Papakōlea on O'ahu, led her neighbors to join Firewise after a firework ignited a hillside in her homestead community on New Year's 2024.

"We were extremely worried about this incident coming off of what happened in Lahaina just a few months before and because the incident could have resulted in the blocking of our single entry and exit for two of our homestead communities, which would have been catastrophic," she said.

Shaw's neighbors bought in to the idea of joining Firewise. They held community meetings, board meetings, assessments, and worked side by side to clean up yards and remove fuels.

"It takes a good amount of work," she says, with Firewise requiring one hour per home per year, meaning 400 hours per year in Papakōlea. "So far we've done over 600 hours in physical work, and that doesn't include the backend administrative labor needed to communicate with the community and different partners."

Shaw says that her neighborhood has seen benefits far beyond fire protection.

"There is tons of community cohesion happening, and we're all getting fit together doing the work!" she points out. "It's also been really beautiful to see it be intergenerational. Our community feels a lot more trusting of one another and there are consistent opportunities for community members to show we care a lot."

"We're empowered to feel like we can actually make a difference and be the change," Shaw adds. "Firewise is a great

way to get started with community organizing, and we need more of this than ever."

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Meanwhile, the state is preparing for a dangerously dry summer with drought conditions already present in Hawai'i and Maui counties. Significant wildfires have already ignited, including a 330-acre wildfire on the southern slopes of Haleakalā on Maui that forced evacuations, and a 600-acre wildfire in the Schofield Barracks training area on O'ahu.

National Weather Service meteorologist John Bravender says wildfire threats will continue.

"We're going into the dry season with drought across Hawai'i County and Maui County, which are likely to see below normal rainfall," he says. "Temperatures across the state are expected to be above normal this summer, which would also contribute to greater concern for drought and wildfire risk."

Chief Todd asks residents to be vigilant and helpful.

"Reporting any signs of smoke or suspicious activity early through 911 is critical to reducing response times and minimizing impact," he says.

During Red Flag Warnings, when winds are strong and temperatures are hot, "we urge residents to postpone high-risk activities like grilling, yard work using motorized tools, and burn-



Continued on page 6

Meet the HIEMA team at these upcoming events!

Come learn about how you can strengthen your own community. Look for the green table and smiling faces!

Lānaʻi Pineapple Festival: Saturday, July 5, 1 to 9 p.m. at Dole Park. Info: www.lanaipineapplefestival.com.

Revitalize Puna Community Preparedness & Resilience Festival: Saturday, July 12, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Billy Kenoi Park Gym. Info: www.revitalizepuna12.eventbrite.com.

Eastside Preparedness Fair: Saturday, August 2, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Kahala Mall, Oʻahu. Info: www.ainahainaprepared.org.



Kailua Preparedness Fair: Saturday, Sept. 13, 9 to noon at Kailua Town Center, Oʻahu. Info: www.kailuaalertprepared.org.

Be Ready Mānoa Preparedness Fair: Saturday, Sept. 20, 9 to 1 at Mānoa Marketplace. Info: www.bereadymanoa.org.

Fire defense – continued from page 5

ing waste,” Chief Todd says.

Localized water conservation can also help firefighters during fires, he says, “particularly in rural or drought-prone areas. Avoiding non-essential water use during wildfire response ensures that reservoirs, tanks and hydrant systems maintain pressure and availability for suppression efforts.”

For the future, Hawaiʻi needs to adapt to a changing environment.

“Wildfire risk has increased in less than one generation,” says HWMO director Pickett. “We have a lot of work to do across the entire system to catch up to the level of threat that we face. It is going to take major policy and funding investments at levels that Hawaiʻi has never pursued before.”

Stormy Weather BOOK CLUB

The Situation Room humanizes leaders in disaster responses

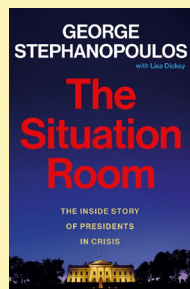
The Situation Room: The Inside Story of Presidents in Crisis by George Stephanopoulos

Review by Julien Canizzaro, HIEMA Community Outreach Specialist

While browsing the bookshelves at the Ala Moana Target for something light to take to the beach, I wasn’t looking to find a deep dive into national crisis management – but *The Situation Room* by George Stephanopoulos caught my eye. As someone early in my career in emergency

management, I was intrigued.

Stephanopoulos opens the doors – figuratively and literally – into one of the most secretive and consequential rooms in the world: the White House Situation Room. The author – who was senior advisor to President Clinton and later became a celebrated political news host – walks readers through pivotal moments in recent US history through the lens of Situation Room staffers. The book details firsthand accounts of the disarray arising from incidents including the JFK assassination, 9/11, and the Bin Laden raid. The book’s strength lies not just in the drama of high-stakes decision-making, but in its illustration of how information, coordination, and leadership come together (or fall short) in moments of crisis.



What I enjoyed most about the book was that it humanizes those in power, providing greater gravity to already profound disasters. It’s a powerful affirmation that the high-stakes deliberations in the White House basement are not too dissimilar to the incidents faced at the state or local level. It highlights the critical importance of preparedness, clear communication channels, and decisive yet flexible leadership – values that apply whether you’re in the Situation Room or in an Emergency Operations Center (like I am).

Ultimately, *The Situation Room* is more than a chronicle of historic crises; it’s a testament to the people, processes, and places that shape America’s response to the unthinkable. It’s the kind of book that kept me on the beach far longer than planned, leaving me with a bad sunburn and a renewed respect for the unseen professionals who stand ready in every crisis.

Seeing the people behind the uniforms in a small-town emergency team

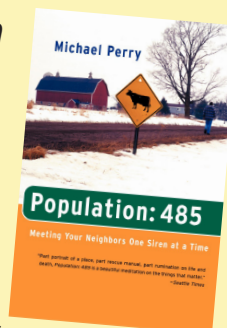
Population: 485 – Meeting Your Neighbors One Siren at a Time by Michael Perry

Review by Patrick Daley, HIEMA Information Specialist

“You put on a uniform, or a jacket embroidered with the Star of Life, or even just a helmet, and suddenly you are imbued with authority. No matter that five minutes ago you were doing dishes, or singing in the shower, or drooling in your sleep.”

So writes Michael Perry – EMT, firefighter, and the redneck poet laureate of

New Auburn, Wisconsin, population: 485. This excellent read is a mix of first-responder memoir, emergency handbook and personal reflections on a community. *Population: 485* reveals the people behind the uniforms – with their quirks and insecurities – and takes the reader along on fire calls and ambulance rides.



Perry’s writing style is quick-moving – light-hearted and lilting, humble and humorous. Detailed scenes of danger and urgency are interjected with comical anecdotes, snippets of community history and tangents of first-responder trivia.

Sometimes people think of government as a machine, a big building. We’re not. We’re your neighbors, we’re uncles and aunts, t-ball coaches, grandparents, surfing buddies. We get up each day to look out for our neighbors – to listen, help, try to improve their lives.

Population: 485 paints a picture of a place, the connections between people and the ways they look out for each other. After all, it takes a village.