

William P. Kenoi
Mayor

Walter K.M. Lau
Managing Director



Darryl J. Oliveira
Civil Defense Administrator

County of Hawaii

CIVIL DEFENSE AGENCY

920 Ululani Street • Hilo, Hawai'i 96720-3958
(808) 935-0031 • Fax (808) 935-6460

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Honorable Doc Hastings, Chairman
United States House of Representatives

Dear Chairman Hastings,

I would like to submit this letter and the enclosed testimony for the Committee on Natural Resources oversight hearing regarding volcano hazards.

As the Administrator of the Hawaii County Civil Defense Agency, on the Island of Hawaii, I would like to provide an overview of a current volcanic eruption and lava flow event that has resulted in the Presidential Declaration of a Disaster under the Public Assistance Program.

Beginning on June 27th of this year (and as the flow is therefore named the June 27th flow) the thirty-one plus year eruption of Pu'u 'Ō'ō experienced a shift in activity from a predominantly southeast flow direction to a northeast direction. The new flow event was and continues to be supplied by a subsurface fissure and tube system that is well developed and established and extends over 13.5 miles from the vent. This stable and uninterrupted supply of lava combined with an efficient tube system that provides the plumbing or transport conduit for the lava has resulted in the down slope inundation threat of a thriving rural community.

Since the June 27th start of the eruption the current flow has advanced on average over 174 yards per day with peak advancement rates of over 400 yards per day and occasional stalls. Erratic and inconsistent rate of advancement is typical for this type of eruption and flow and presents many challenges with forecasting potential impacts. These challenges have been expressed to the community with emphasis placed on how difficult and frustrating the circumstances will be for the entire community.

On October 25, 2014 at approximately 3:50 a.m., the advancing flow made its first crossing of a public roadway and although in a fairly remote area of the community, marked the first impact on public infrastructure, highlighting the reality of the event and likely scenarios to follow. Following this event, the flow advanced toward the community of Pahoa, inundated a Buddhist cemetery, and entered a private residential property before coming to a stop approximately 480 feet from the primary village road. Since that time the flow has experienced significant inflation or internal build up as a result of continued supply of lava and the lack of any significant forward advancement and results in frequent breakouts or leakage of lava along the flow margins that promotes the widening of the flow as well as along the flow surface.

On Monday November 10th at approximately 11:55a.m., the first residence to be destroyed by the current flow was ignited by the advancing lava. Within minutes, the home was fully engulfed and later collapsed and was consumed by the lava. Today, the remnants of the residence's corrugated metal roof panels and random debris are all that remain of the structure and much of which sit atop the lava flow.

Throughout the evolution of the eruption and flow event, the County of Hawaii and its stakeholders and partners have strived to identify possible contingency plans, proactive mitigation and protection measures, and to provide



timely and accurate information and advisories to our island residents and visitors. The fundamental goal is to prevent any possible loss of life or serious injury related to the lava flow. The collaboration demonstrated throughout this event is reflective of the commitment and dedication of all stakeholders with insuring the safety and welfare of our residents and visitors. Through a unified approach to managing this event, fundamental and prioritized missions or operational branches have been identified and established. The division and allocation of mission objectives has allowed for an effective and efficient response to the ongoing event and includes but is not limited the following:

- Providing for the safety and security of area residents and visitors
- Maintaining and sustaining transportation access to and from the community
- Maintaining and sustaining fundamental utility services (electricity, telephone, water, gas, cellular and broadband services, etc.)
- Sustaining access to health care (to include mental health and pharmacy services)
- Sustaining access to basic commodities and services (food, fuel, etc.)
- Maintaining a stable and enriching educational experience for area youth and students.

As a matter of brevity I am limiting the examples of efforts being made to include: the development and deployment of protective measures around at risk utility poles to minimize impact from direct contact with the lava; the construction of three alternate access routes to support residential, commercial, and emergency vehicle traffic; and the establishment of temporary or portable classroom facilities and the redistribution of student body and faculty to provide for an uninterrupted school year and curriculum delivery.

In summary, I would like to emphasize that the hazards of volcanic activity and the threats posed on area communities are varying and complex. The threats and impacts of this hazard are often difficult to forecast with any degree of certainty and require a proactive approach to reduce risk. We appreciate the federal support provided thus far and we have and continue to enjoy a very collaborative relationship with our federal partners. As we move forward with the response and mitigation of the current eruption event it is essential to consider the unique issues and challenges that may likely exceed the capabilities and capacity of the local and state government and to continue to receive federal support to the fullest extent possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony and I apologize for not being able to participate in the committee hearing.

Sincerely,



Darryl J. Oliveira