



Risk of Fires and Strong Storms in Hawaii During the Summer of 2024

**Joe Clarkson, President
PMKCA**

The following information is excerpted from a recent memorandum from Fire Chief Kazuo S.K.L. Todd to all Hawaii County Fire Department personnel. Much of the memorandum should be of great interest to the general public. PMKCA is pleased to be given permission to share this information with its members and all readers of the Hāmākua Times. Recent years have seen significant fires in the Paauilo and Waimea areas, which remind us of the importance of vigilance and preparation for every household. PMKCA notes are in italics.

2024 PEAK FIRE SEASON OUTLOOK AND PREPAREDNESS

As we enter peak fire season in Hawai'i, which runs from May through October, I wanted to take the time to send out this memorandum to keep us informed about the potential risks and necessary preparedness due to the evolving climate and weather conditions. Here is an overview of the current climate outlook and its impact on our operational readiness for the 2024 Hawai'i peak fire season.

Climate and Weather Outlook

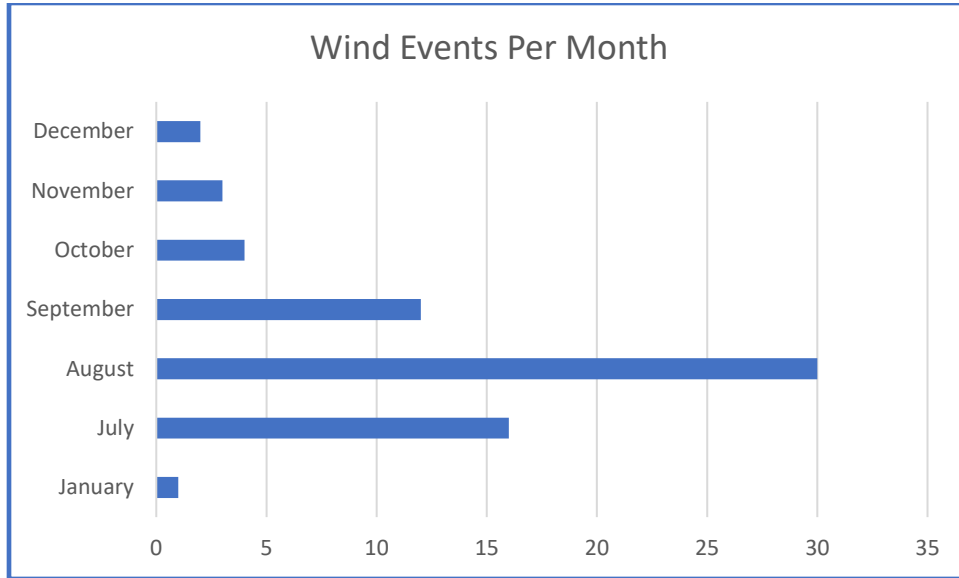
We are currently experiencing El Niño conditions in the equatorial Pacific, which have been showing signs of weakening since the beginning of the year. The Climate Prediction Center (CPC) forecasts an 85% probability of transitioning to neutral El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) conditions within the next two months. Additionally, there is a growing likelihood (60% chance) of a rapid shift to La Niña conditions over the summer. La Niña conditions generally produce more named storms in the Atlantic and less than-average storms in the Pacific. This does not remove the chance of hurricanes and major fires in Hawai'i, but it is worth keeping track of.

Impact on Fire Season in Hawai'i

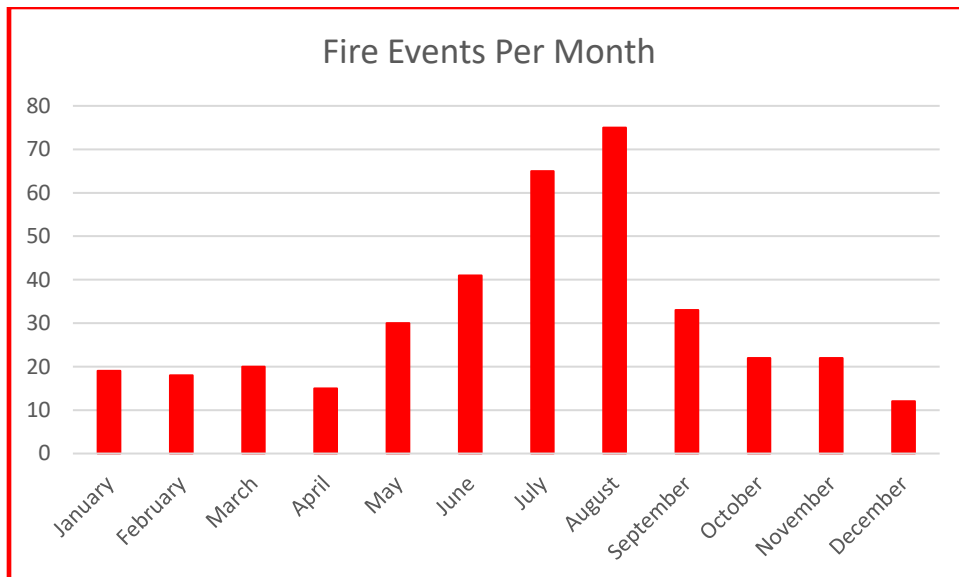
Our region, particularly the leeward areas of Maui and the Big Island, is forecasted to experience above-normal fire potential from May through August for 2024. This forecast is driven by the predicted weather patterns and their interaction with local conditions. Analysis of past data, reflected in the charts below, indicates a significant increase in fire incidents during the summer months, with August being notably the peak month.

This trend is coupled with larger fires in terms of area burned, which also tend to occur during this period, although the frequency of such large-scale fires is generally low.

Historical Wind Events in Hawaii



Historical Fire Events in Hawaii



This means that while the total number of named storms in the Pacific may be reduced, the potential remains for large fires and/or wind events. This potential will, based on history, peak in August and then return to our normal range in October.

Precautionary Measures

Given the forecast and historical trends, it is imperative that we heighten our vigilance and readiness as we move into the time of the year where our potential for large incidents increases.

Chief Todd then prescribes some key actions for Fire Department personnel. We include several that are also appropriate for the general public.

- All personnel should maintain a heightened awareness of local weather and climate conditions.
- Prepare at home for any disaster that might occur. This preparation should involve your family and consider your personal needs.
- Consider preparing your house for hurricane-level winds and prepare a go kit for your family.
- All personnel should raise awareness about fire prevention and safety measures when the opportunity arises.

Chief Todd concludes:

Each department member should stay informed and prepared as we navigate the upcoming peak fire season. Your dedication and vigilance are vital in safeguarding our community and natural resources.

Mahalo for your continued commitment to excellence and safety.

Sincerely,
KAZUO S. K. L. TODD
Fire Chief

(Excerpted from Hawaii County Fire Department Memorandum of 8 May 2024, "2024 Peak Fire Season Outlook and Preparedness.")