



January 2024 Newsletter

PMKCA Looks Ahead to 2024

Addressing the need for accurate and timely communication in the event of a serious emergency.

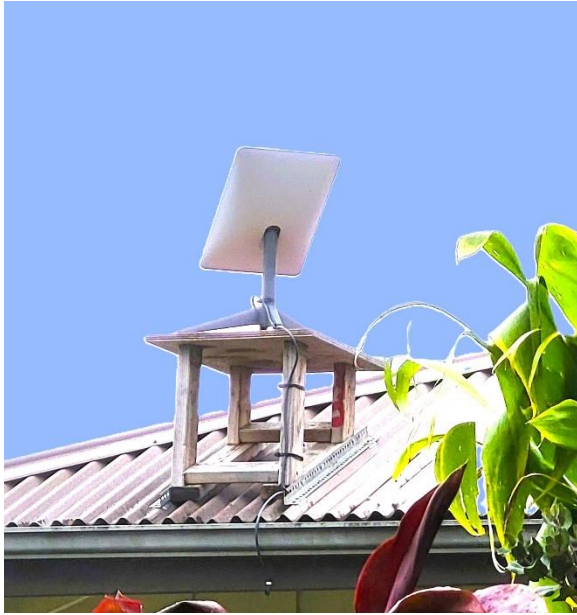
Joe Clarkson
PMKCA President

The year that is just about to close has presented some successes, and some challenges to our communities. PMKCA continued to support its projects in Kalōpā Park, sharing information about invasive species, encouraging participation in other groups (volunteer fire company 8A, for example). But the wildfire that Pa'auilo experienced in May, while relatively small and isolated, which was followed by the horrific fires on Maui in August, left many of us aware of the critical need for accurate and timely information that could easily reach every member of our community.

In 2024, we will continue to keep our projects going strong and we intend to increase our attention to emergency preparedness, response planning and communication. Indeed, realistic response to community-wide emergencies almost always comes down to communication between members of the community and between the community and emergency responders. You can't get help if you don't have the means to ask for help.

In our day-to-day life we take ease of communication for granted. The telephone and cell phones almost always work, we can send text messages and emails whenever we want, and in a household emergency we can always call 911 and get a response. But there are many kinds of events that can disrupt easy communication, and rural communities like ours and others on the Hāmākua Coast are particularly vulnerable due to our isolation and rural conditions. Power outages will result in loss of ground-based phone and internet services for most of us. A wildfire or a hurricane can take down cell towers and prevent mobile phone services from working.

In 2024, PMKCA will concentrate on information gathering and surveys to determine what communication services might remain after a severe tropical storm; for example, one that takes down most of our normal communication infrastructure. What might be left after high winds take down power lines, cell towers and fiberoptic cables over a wide area?



A Starlink dish installed on a roof in Pa'auilo.

One answer might be a new communication service that has recently come to Hāmākua. Starlink® is the new satellite internet system that SpaceX is well underway installing. Since Starlink uses satellites for relaying internet data from one place to another, “on the ground” conditions are much less of a factor in maintaining communications. Starlink service on the Big Island started in early 2023 and some of our neighbors have begun to take advantage of it.

But we need to do more research about how well Starlink will hold up during a major emergency here. The satellites themselves are in low earth orbit and well away from any danger, but these satellites communicate with ground stations that then connect with fiberoptic trunk lines.

Households rely on a small antenna for connection to one or more satellites. Ground stations are very widely spaced and, should one station be disrupted, there will be others that are available for satellites to “talk” to.

Some of the questions PMKCA will be researching in 2024: How many Starlink customers are there in our neighborhoods? How durable and storm resistant are the household antennas? Does the county, particularly Hawaii County Civil Defense and other county emergency responders, utilize Starlink as a backup connection to the internet? Will Starlink customers in our area be willing and able to let their connections be used for emergency communications? If so, how would that be organized?

Imagine our circumstances after a major wind event that takes down most communications systems. Trees are down everywhere, and many roads are blocked. Anyone with a small drone like the one I have could survey a wide area, take pictures of significant damage, trek over to the nearest neighbor who has Starlink and email the images to Civil Defense or Public Works.

When it comes to communication, Starlink is a new opportunity available in our community to help our residents withstand the potentially devastating effects of a serious emergency. But placing all our precious “eggs” in one basket wouldn’t be wise. There are other communication networks that are also being developed and supported. Ham radio networks, while requiring training, protocols, and specialized equipment, have been essential to emergency response for as long as radio technology has been available. There may continue to be a need for ham radio operators within our community.

Another form of communication and information sharing that has been essential to survival for thousands of years are the networks that exist between people. We are hoping to encourage

and support efforts that allow local “neighbor-to neighbor” groups to form around being prepared for emergencies. We see them forming naturally – between ranchers with livestock to move, within ohanas who know their vulnerable kupuna and keiki, among neighbors on difficult or dead-end roads – and we want to help provide tools for accurate and timely information, and for connections to responders in an emergency.

These kinds of communication scenarios, and others, will be explored in depth this coming year. We may ask for your participation and input as we work towards this goal. After all, the objective is to be a “STRONG” community, long before a disaster requires it of us.

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## ***PMKCA Meetings & Events***

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January Board of Directors Meeting

THURSDAY, January 11, 2024, at 6PM

Denning’s Home – 44-3220 Kula Kahiko Rd.

This meeting will be reviewing our past and future events and committee activities, as well as planning the annual membership meeting. All members are welcome to attend and bring their interests and concerns to the Board.

2024 PMKCA General Membership Meeting

TUESDAY, January 30, 2024, at 7PM

Pa’auilo Hongwanji social hall

43-1477 Hau’ola Rd. (Old town Pa’auilo)

All PMKCA members and residents of mauka Pa’auilo and Kalōpā are welcome to attend our annual membership meeting. ***We have changed the location this year to the Pa’auilo Hongwanji.*** There will be speakers and reports from our committees, and a chance to connect with neighbors and talk about our priorities in 2024. It’s also a great time to become a member of PMKCA or to renew your membership.

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## ***Join PMKCA or Renew your Membership for 2024***

PMKCA dues are only \$20 per calendar year and help support so many great community activities. Click the "Visit our website" link below and choose Membership. We offer a PayPal option, or mail a check made out to PMKCA, PO Box 408, Pa'auilo, HI 96776.

[\*\*\*Visit our Website\*\*\*](#)