



PMKCA Newsletter – May 2025

What if shipping to Hawaii is interrupted?

Long Term “Worst Case Scenario” Emergency Planning

Joe Clarkson
PMKCA Past President

The Hawaiian Islands are separated from the main arteries of global commerce by thousands of miles. For example, it is about 2,500 miles from any port in Hawaii to Los Angeles (the closest port of significance) and 98% of shipments into Hawaii arrive by ship. Despite this distance and our dependence on the continuous arrival of shipped freight into Hawaii, we simply take it for granted that it will always continue.

But what if something, like a war or devastating Pacific-wide tsunami, happened to interrupt sea freight to Hawaii? How would everyone on the Big Island cope? Are there any plans to keep water and food available during a prolonged period of isolation from trans-Pacific supply chains?

The short answer to that last question is “Yes”. I discussed these possibilities recently with Talmadge Magno, the Director of the Hawaii County Civil Defense Agency (HCCDA). Much of the information to follow stems from that conversation.

Emergency Powers

State law (HRS 127A, Chapter 12) grants county mayors, and through them Civil Defense and other public agencies, extraordinary power during emergencies. For example, the law allows the mayor to:

Sponsor and develop mutual aid plans and agreements for emergency management between one or more counties, and other governmental, private-sector, or nonprofit organizations, for the furnishing or exchange of food, clothing, medicine, and other materials; engineering services; emergency housing; police services; health, medical, and related services; firefighting, rescue, transportation, and construction services and facilities; personnel necessary to provide or conduct these services; and other materials, facilities, personnel, and services as may be needed. The mutual aid plans and

agreements may be made with or without provisions for reimbursement of costs and expenses, and on terms and conditions as are deemed necessary.

If an emergency isolated Hawaii Island from the rest of the world, county officials can take control of the distribution of food and fuel to ensure that available supplies are fairly distributed. For example, while there are no stockpiles of emergency food on our island (the only FEMA store of emergency food is on Oahu), all the stores of food and other supplies kept in commercial warehouses can come under the control of the county government. Similar power exists regarding fuel, distribution of electricity and water supplies. In a declared emergency, every state and local public employee can be required to help with the response.

HCCDA has undertaken an extensive planning process, including numerous tabletop exercises, to practice taking control of on-island supplies to minimize risks to life and safety. A prolonged period without ships coming into our island ports would put these plans to an extreme test. We will never know how things will work out until such an event happens, but it is reassuring to know that detailed response planning has actually happened.

Emergency Communications

Managing these activities during an emergency requires clear lines of communication between the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in Hilo and everyone throughout the county responding to the emergency. In addition to the dedicated radio system currently being used every day by fire and police first responders, emergency communications can take place over the cellular radio First Net system and ground- and satellite-based email systems. Amateur (HAM) radio may also be used, especially if other island-wide communications systems are problematic.

Family Preparation

The HCCDA website (link below) includes numerous planning guides for families and businesses about how to prepare for emergencies.

<https://dod.hawaii.gov/hiema/get-ready/prepare-your-family/>

These guides generally target a 14-day supply of food and water to support a family during an emergency. Many families, including my own, have prepared for much longer food shortages. ***It's important to remember that if fewer families need assistance during an emergency, it's better for everyone, especially the most vulnerable.***

PS - A future article from PMKCA will discuss detailed methods of long-term food storage.

~~~~~ COMING UP! ~~~~~

***SPECIAL EVENT!***

**Let's Talk Story about...**

**Dangerous Dogs Threatening our Community**

*This event is the second in a series of local gatherings  
to learn about and discuss issues of importance in our community.*

**Saturday, May 17, 4 to 6pm**

St. Columba Episcopal Church, 43-1425 Hauola Rd, Pa'auilo

**RSVP to [news.PMKCA@gmail.com](mailto:news.PMKCA@gmail.com)**

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