



**HAWAII DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
HAWAII DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

News Release

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**INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE MEETS TO ADDRESS
VOLCANO EMISSION PROBLEMS**

Honolulu - The State today convened an Interagency Task Force meeting in Hilo to address the Kilauea Volcano emission hazard and to develop strategies to mitigate the effects, especially in regard to public health and agriculture. The meeting was called by Governor Linda Lingle and was convened by State Civil Defense Director Major Gen. Robert G.F. Lee at the State Office Building in Hilo this morning.

Since March 12, 2008, sulfur dioxide emissions from a new gas vent in Halemaumau Crater have affected residents with respiratory problems, caused voluntary evacuations, and caused significant damage to agricultural farms and ranches. The emissions have also caused concern for the long-term effects on health, water quality and agriculture.

Task Force members represented the following agencies: Hawai'i County Mayor Harry Kim; Hawai'i County Fire Department; State departments of Health, Civil Defense, Public Safety and Agriculture; University of Hawai'i College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR); U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency (FSA), Hawaiian Volcano Observatory (U.S. Geological Survey) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Health Director Dr. Chiyome Fukino reported on the Department of Health's (DOH) active role in supporting the county's emergency management by providing real-time air quality data directly to the county's Emergency Operations Center. The department is currently working with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on the development of the first national air quality index for sulfur dioxide.

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To further assess health risk, the DOH will be meeting with a multidisciplinary team traveling to the island of Hawai'i in August from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry to complete an environmental health risk analysis and assessment. The department is also continuing to monitor public water systems that utilize rainwater catchment and provide guidance to owners of catchment systems that may be affected by volcanic emissions. Surveillance and evaluation of data from hospitals, community health centers and physicians is also ongoing.

Hawaii Department of Agriculture Chairperson, Sandra Lee Kunimoto, reported that serious damage has occurred to agriculture, especially protea and other flower crops in the areas of Oceanview Estate, Wood Valley, Pahala and Kau. Damage has also been reported in some coffee and macadamia nut fields.

Livestock operations have experienced some eye irritation in cattle. However, more significant damage is being observed in the accelerated deterioration of galvanized fencing, gates, pipelines and other infrastructure.

On June 20, 2008, Governor Lingle requested that U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Edward Schafer declare Hawai'i County a disaster area due to volcanic emissions. A response is expected soon on whether federal disaster aid will be available.

Also in June, the Governor requested assistance from the EPA to support the state's efforts to assess and address the issue of volcanic emissions. EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson responded to the Governor in a July 11, 2008 letter indicating the EPA's willingness to assist the state and offered technical support from EPA's Region 9 for both air and water quality issues relating to the volcanic emissions. Johnson also accepted the Governor's invitation to participate in the multi-agency task force.

State Civil Defense will be assembling the information from today's meeting and will develop recommendations for short-term and long-term actions.

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