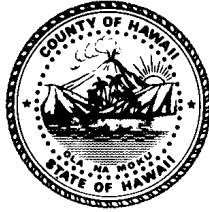


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Civil Defense plans island-wide tsunami warning exercise

Tuesday, January 27, won't be an ordinary day in Hawaii County. Residents along the coastal areas that are vulnerable to the devastating effects of tsunamis will be witnessing an island-wide exercise designed to help County agencies be better prepared for a tsunami.

This will be the first full-scale tsunami response exercise conducted on the Big Island in many years, said Hawaii County Civil Defense administrator Quince Mento.

The training exercise will be highly visible to residents in or near tsunami inundation zones beginning shortly after 8 a.m., when County police, fire fighters and County crews will be mobilizing according to their existing tsunami response plans.

Earthquakes that occur on the Pacific Rim can give Hawaii as little as four hours to prepare for a tsunami.

"We've been very lucky in recent years in Hawaii County," said Mento. The last significant tsunami generated on the Pacific Rim hit the Big Island in 1960, yet the island remains highly vulnerable to tsunamis generated by seismic activity that can occur any time, anywhere in the Pacific Ocean, Mento said.

County Civil Defense officials work closely with the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center to predict the size and estimated time of arrival in Hawaii when tsunamis are generated. The January 27th exercise will simulate a tsunami generated by an earthquake in Alaska, which would provide four hours of warning before it actually hit Hawaii.

The exercise is designed to test how well the County's communications systems work in the event that a real tsunami is coming. Civil Defense notification procedures will be

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activated for the public, governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations such as public utility companies and the American Red Cross.

County Police officers will be assigned to key intersections where traffic would be turned back in the event of an actual tsunami warning. Police officers will be issuing fliers to motorists providing information about what would happen if the real warning were in effect. Roads will not be barricaded but motorists may experience minor delays. Barricades will be delivered to the intersections as part of the exercise but they will not be erected.

Residents may see lots of vehicle movement exercise, including county trucks, police cars and helicopters on the ground and in the air, and crews with the banners and barricades at their assigned intersections.

“I am confident that Quince Mento and the Hawaii County Civil Defense team are well prepared in the event of an island-wide disaster and that this will demonstrate their effectiveness,” said Hawaii County Mayor Billy Kenoi. “This kind of an exercise also demonstrates their dedication to bringing all of the different agencies involved, public and private, together to be ready do the best possible job of protecting our residents and property in times of emergency.”

The 8 a.m. starting time for the exercise is when various agencies will be notified to begin deploying banners and barricades at key intersections. The time was chosen so that it would not conflict with morning school traffic.

“Real world” emergencies, should they occur during the exercise, will take precedence for police officers, fire fighters and Civil Defense officials, Mento said.

The exercise will be over after police report that all simulated road block locations are secure. That is expected to occur by 10 a.m.

The impact on residents is expected to be minimal. Motorists in coastal areas however should drive carefully and be aware that police officers assigned to intersections in tsunami inundation zones may be distributing information about the tsunami exercise.

All County departments will conduct internal reviews of their procedures following the exercise to evaluate their effectiveness and make changes where necessary, said Mento, who is planning to make the tsunami exercise an annual event.

Civil Defense also will use its new electronic mass emergency notification system, City Watch, in conjunction with the exercise. The automated telephone system allows quick notification of large numbers of county personnel to respond to emergencies.

For more information about the exercise, call Hawaii County Civil Defense, 961-8229.

For more information about tsunamis, visit the web sites of the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center <http://www.prh.noaa.gov/ptwc/>, and the Pacific Tsunami Museum, <http://www.tsunami.org/>.

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