

COMMUNITY-BASED TSUNAMI PREPAREDNESS

Kekaha Tsunami Evacuation Drill March 7, 2008

This is a story of how a community can work together to prepare for a tsunami and other natural hazards.

On the morning of March 7, 2008, a community-supported tsunami school evacuation drill was conducted in Kekaha on the Island of Kauai in Hawaii, USA. The exercise involved four schools and 550 students and was supported by local businesses and government offices. Preparing four schools to evacuate required a great deal of coordination and collaboration among many people.

The effort was led by School Community Council President Barbara Bulatao-Franklin and Student Services Coordinator Jean Warren. The principal of Kekaha Elementary, Jason Yoshida, met with the principals of St. Catherine's School, and Hawaii Hawaiian-language Charter Schools Kekula `o Ni`ihau and Kula Aupuni to plan the exercise. Officials at the U.S. Army Pacific Missile Range Facility, Hawaii Air National Guard, U.S. Marine Corps League, Kauai Police, Kauai Fire Department, Kauai Civil Defense, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) were involved in the planning, assisted during the drill, and provided feedback. Prior to the exercise, State Civil Defense volunteer Manny Mattos provided tsunami preparedness talks to students and parents.

Local businesses Hardware Hawaii and Costco donated backpacks for the students and funding for water and energy bars. NOAA provided tsunami safety activity materials for student backpacks and educational resources to the schools.

The drill was deemed successful by the organizers. The evacuations were orderly and students began arriving at the designated staging areas within 10 minutes with the last to arrive within 20 minutes. Several lessons were learned about traffic patterns, alternative routes, additional supplies, safety procedures, communication improvements, and so on that will be incorporated into a future exercise.

The exercise was a prelude to Tsunami Awareness Month in Hawaii which commemorates the devastating April 1, 1946, Aleutian Islands tsunami that caused death and damage throughout the State. The 1946 tsunami led to the development of the U.S. Tsunami Warning System in 1949.

This event was covered and documented by the ITIC and NOAA Office of Communications in Hawaii. For further information, please contact:

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