ALOHA FROM MAUI

Beaches, big surf, volcanoes & valleys make Maui one of the most beautiful & perilous response areas in the United States.

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PHOTO MARK POKINI

Maui County FireDepartment personnel face demanding response situations that require intense cross-training and flexibility.

Aloha. As one can imagine, Maui County in Hawai'i is a very special place to live. The weather is beautiful year-round, with partly cloudy skies, temperatures averaging 84 degrees and tropic winds blowing from the northeast. The island is an outdoor person's dream. We have mountains to hike, rivers to swim and waves to surf. You can charter a boat to fish in the ocean, ride a bicycle down a volcano or fly down a zip line across a valley. These outdoor activities present risks, and Maui County Fire Department (MCFD) responders are tasked with developing and assessing response plans that minimize or mitigate those risks.

Resource & Response Challenges

MCFD serves four islands; Maui, the largest, measures 728 square miles. The other islands are Moloka'i, Lana'i and Kaho'olawe. Only Maui, Moloka'i and Lana'i are populated, with a total population of about 155,000 residents. However, more than 2 million tourists visit Maui County annually, with the summer months attracting the most visitors. Our response area includes Mt. Haleakala, with elevations of up to 10,000 feet at its peak, miles of shoreline and various channels between islands. We have some pretty intense response expectations: On any given shift, personnel might

be required to go offensive on a house fire, chase a flank on a brush fire, rappel down cliffs, hang out of a helicopter and Jet Ski in 20-foot surf. It is difficult to be proficient in all aspects of our emergency response, especially when there's an ocean between the islands in our response area that can stand between a hazard zone and the needed resources.



PHOTO MARK POKINI



PHOTO COURTESY MCFD

Despite our diverse and widespread response area, our resources are fairly limited. We have 303 uniformed personnel and nine support staff. We have 14 stations (10 on Maui, three on Moloka'i and one on Lana'i); 18 companies (14 engines, two quints, one rescue, one hazmat); and two battalions. Our fleet also includes five water tenders and four mini-trucks. We also have two brush trucks for wildland fire response, which makes up most of our fire response. (See "Island Interface" sidebar.)

To address the rescue challenges Maui County's environment presents, we have three rescue boats, four Jet Skis and one helicopter used for surf rescue, water search and rescue, and mountain/cliff search and rescue.

Island Hopping

A response area that spans Maui, Moloka'i, Lana'i and Kaho'olawe presents some logistical challenges—especially when personnel or resources on one island are needed on another. Although ferries travel between the islands throughout the day, travel times can take up to 2.5 hours, depending on the specific ferry and the conditions within the channels. To make sure its personnel and resources can get where they need to be, the Maui County Fire Department sometimes uses its rescue boats for transport. In addition, the department contracts with a local helicopter company to provide air support for wildland firefighting. When they fly from Maui to other islands to help with wildland response, they often take personnel with them. There are also planes that transport personnel when necessary.

Our minimum staffing is four personnel per company. If a significant fire or emergency occurs on any of the islands within the county, additional resources will either boat or fly over to assist. (See "Island Hopping," right.) MCFD has only one company dedicated to technical rescue, Rescue 10, stationed on Maui Island. This company responds to all four islands when necessary, usually by helicopter. Rescue 10 also serves as one of our fireground support companies for building fires and is typically dispatched with the first alarm. Our one dedicated hazmat unit, Hazmat 10, is also stationed on Maui and also serves as a fireground support company. Since any significant emergency depletes our resources quickly, we utilize callback crews and fire administration personnel as our next line of defense.

Training

Because each station must be fairly self-sufficient, training is crucial in our world. Our training plan has three elements: initial certification, continuing education and professional development.

We are a Pro Board organization, and our initial certifications align with appropriate NFPA standards. Continuing education delivered via quarterly drills helps maintain minimum skills for driver operator, suppression, technical rescue and hazmat. We also have training programs, organized in a cadre system, managed by a program director. As part of our professional development component, we offer officer-development certifications annually. These cadres coordinate with the department's training bureau to deliver approved curriculum. Programs include EMR, vehicle





PHOTOS KIMBERLEY K MULLEN

MCFD's training facility has multiple training props to prepare responders in a realistic manner.

extrication, surf rescue, rope rescue, dive rescue, confined-space rescue, fireground operations, fire apparatus driver/operator, FGS/RIT, hazmat, ICS, and wildland. We use hands-on applications as well as online educational deliveries.

Our department is also heavy into all-hazards incident management team (AHIMT) training, delivering position-specific training regularly. All of our officers have completed ICS 300 and 400, which is the foundation of the AHIMT development. Our organization cooperates with other county organizations to train a team that can deploy to big events locally and abroad. For the most part, our training facilities provide realistic training opportunities. We have multiple training props for all firefighter tasks. Our 1,800-square-foot, single-story burn prop is made out of Conex boxes. It has a 900-square-foot combustible flat roof on top, which allows us to ventilate over fires and realistically coordinate fire attacks.

Even though we have a training facility available, our department faces the additional challenge of flying and boating personnel to Maui for training. There is an obvious logistical piece we must manage carefully to meet training levels, and with that comes travel and overtime costs. We are always looking for practical solutions that increase training efficacy and limit expenses.

A Portable Training Solution

One of the ways MCFD manages its multi-island training challenge is with the Blue Card Command Program, which includes a 50-hour online course based on the "Fire Command" curriculum package. After completing the 50-hour online program, students can participate in Blue Card's evaluation/testing phase: a three-day simulation lab. Many Blue Card students complete the sim-lab portion at command training centers (CTCs) throughout the continental United States. However, one of the unique aspects of the program—and one that makes Blue Card ideal for a department like ours—is the CTC in a Box. This is a cache of laptops loaded with the simulations necessary to complete the three-day evaluation sequence. The CTC in a Box allows us to bring training from Maui to our members on Moloka'i and Lana'i—the two other inhabited islands we serve.



PHOTO RICHARD APANA



PHOTO KEVIN MCAFEE

Azure-blue waters and surreal mountains sometimes serve as picturesque backdrops for trouble. MCFD responders not only know and respect the terrain, they are thoroughly prepared to work in any environment.

We exercise our Blue Card command and control skills quarterly. Annually, we complete a live-fire, real-time multi-company response to exercise our command and control capabilities from the fast-attack position. It is the culminating event of all our suppression training within that year. This training allows us to practice transitioning from a fast-attacking IC to a strategically positioned IC.

In October 2012, we got a real-life opportunity to put our Blue Card training to the test. Only half of our officers had completed the three-day certification when we got toned out to a large, two-story commercial building with a working fire on the second floor of the Delta Side. The building sat between two heavily occupied, two-story condominiums. The call came in at approximately 0600 hours on a weekend.

Island Interface

Even paradise gets its share of wildfires.

Although Maui can be quite humid, it's not immune to wildfire activity. The south and west sides of the island—the sides most popular among tourists—burn the most frequently. These fires burn in the Kiawe trees and light brush, traveling on the strong, swirling winds and wreaking havoc on county fire resources. These fires travel hot and fast, typically running into highways, where they keep tourists from getting to the airport and prevent locals from getting to work.



PHOTO COURTESY MCFD

The alarm was quickly upgraded. In our system, this means six engines, two trucks, one rescue, one hazmat, two response chiefs, and administration positions were dispatched, exhausting about 95 percent of our response force on that island. I was called out from my home approximately 50 minutes from the fire. As I drove to the scene, I listened to the radio communications. I had never heard our people speak with such calm and clarity. When I arrived, the organization seemed in control. The initial strategy was offensive with coordinated vertical ventilation and attack lines to the second floor for fire control. The battalion chief for that shift, Capt. Kelan Puaa, was on temporary assignment. After he arrived on scene, he switched the strategy to defensive as the fire had taken hold of the attic. Before the Blue Card training, our members would have been unsure of this decision. It was fortunate that Captain Puaa had just completed his Blue Card certification before this call. He organized the building into divisions and assigned division supervisors (something else we would have been unsure of previously). As the incident progressed, more companies arrived on scene. Only half had received their Blue Card training. You could hear a significant difference in communications between those who

had completed the training and those who had not. This gap would soon catch up with us. We employed multiple operational channels to minimize radio chatter. That went sideways quickly; we lost track of resources and assignments. At that point, we were defensive, so all resources were positioned outside and beyond the collapse zone. Still, we were disconnected throughout portions of the incident, and trying to account for our resources was difficult. We did manage to get things under control, and the fire did go out. The support functions within the command post were great, which allowed us to transition command well. However, the difference between the Blue Card personnel and those who had not received their training was pretty clear.

The moral of the story is that the Blue Card system made our department better. Its positive effects are numerous and appear at many levels. It has had a huge impact on our department at many different levels—from the old school officers down to the rookies just out of recruit school. The standardized perspective, communications, and actions have simplified things for everyone, including our officers. Decisions are clearer, and unnecessary communications have been minimized. Coordination and accountability are improved.

We first considered a program like Blue Card not only because it allowed us to bring training to all our members, but because I could see the system would deliver great training impact in a relatively short time for a good price. Although this program is new to our system, it has merged well into our existing training program. We have certified all of our company officers and battalion chiefs. Our driver operators/acting officers have completed the online course and are currently completing the officer certification. Our department is still in transition, but the future looks bright, and we now have a good foundation to build upon. We are considering a fixed CTC in the near future so we can host certification labs for other counties within the state of Hawaii. BS



Amos Lonokailua-Hewett retired prematurely in March 2019 as a battalion chief due to a bout with Stage 3 colon cancer after 25 years of service. He is healthy again and living a full life in Maui with his wife Mitzie and 'Ohana (family). He is the president of Waihona Emergency & Training Consultants LLC. He is still training firefighters and fire instructors along with clients who look to identify and reduce risk in their organizations. Amos is also the vice president of the 50th State FOOLS, helping the fire service in the State of Hawai'i any way that he can.