

Hawaii volcano eruption sends local brokers scrambling to help residents

An earthquake and the eruption of Kilauea has unleashed lava, released dangerous sulfur dioxide and caused the evacuation of several communities

BY [GILL SOUTH](#) Staff Writer | MAY 4

Beautiful Hawaii comes with earthquakes and volcanoes, that's just the way it is, said senior brokers at Big Island real estate brokerage Clark Realty Corporation this morning.

Communities from the subdivisions of Leilani Estates and Lanipuna Gardens in the Puna District on Hawaii's Big Island were evacuated yesterday and today as the island's most active volcano, Kilauea, unleashed lava in an area near Hilo. Officials ordered as many as [1,500 area residents](#) to evacuate.

The lava came through cracks created after a magnitude 5 earthquake ([on a scale from 1 to 8](#)) that occurred Thursday morning. As many as



Ash plume from Pu'u 'Ō'ō crater in Hawaii | Credit: [USGS photo by Kevan Kamibayashi](#)

The Hawaii Fire Department reported extremely high levels of dangerous sulfur dioxide in the evacuation area, and the local civil defense agency warned of [“active volcanic fountaining”](#) at Leilani Estates subdivision at 5:24 a.m. local time.

The Leilani Estates subdivision, around 25 miles from Kilauea, has around 770 structures and 1,700 residents, while the Lanipuna Gardens subdivision is smaller and on the oceanside.



Still from a USGS video showing fissure in Leilani Estates subdivision | Credit: [USGS](#)

Residents from the area who had been evacuated awoke without knowing if their houses were still standing, according to reporting from the local newspaper [The Honolulu Star Advertiser](#). The residents,

some of who have volcano insurance, reported a 492-foot-long fissure burst from the ground with lava for about two hours in Leilani Estates, according to the newspaper.

Julie Hugo, broker-in-charge at Clark Realty Corporation's Hilo office, told Inman she had been on the phone texting agents and clients since around 5 a.m. Two of the 40 agents at her brokerage live in the Leilani Estates division and were still in their homes this morning, Hugo said, but added they weren't close to the lava flow.



Julie Hugo, broker in charge Clark Realty Corporation | Credit: Julie Hugo

"I've told them to continue to monitor the situation and keep safe with their families and alerted them to the toxic gas, which you can't see, but if the wind changes [it can be harmful] ... " Hugo said. "I also reminded them that the community shelters that are open are pet-friendly."

The properties at the Leilani Estates subdivision typically sit on an acre, and many residents have animals, so they can be more reluctant to leave their homes, in the face of a deadly natural disaster.

"People are concerned about the welfare of their belongings and their inability to take the five dogs," said Hugo, adding: "I know my agents have started reaching out to clients checking on them, some have second homes there which are being rented prior to coming here to retire. It's that kind of community — slower paced."

The disaster hits a real estate market that's consistently busy all year round, said Hugo. The real estate brokerage has 14 active residential listings in the MLS for Leilani Estates currently plus nine in escrow, one of which is cancelling today due to the disaster.

Insurance companies had already let their insurance brokerages know that they had placed a moratorium on any insurance policies, which will be relevant for properties in escrow, said Hugo.

"This is the part of the world we live in, it's [our global climate](#)," she said.

Her fellow broker in charge, Gae Calloway, who lives on the other side of Big Island, said that when something like this happens, residents became strongly aware that this is part of living in a Lava Zone 1 area. Thankfully there was no news of lives lost thanks to a few days' notice after a series of earthquakes this week, she said.

"People that knew about it were prepared and had their run-and-go bag ready. Everybody in Hawaii knows it might happen to them at some point and is ready to help," she said.

Hugo said anyone who wanted to help from other parts of the U.S. could send donations to the Red Cross, which was only just recovering from the recent [flash flooding and mudslides](#) in Kauai in April.

[Email Gill South](#). Article image credited to Ken Canning/Getty Images.

Hawaii's real estate community responds to volcano's path of destruction

At least 35 structures were reported destroyed and 1,700 people forced to evacuate as lava continues to flow

BY [GILL SOUTH](#) Staff Writer | MAY 7

On Monday, the real estate community on the Big Island of Hawaii were digesting the news that 26 homes had been destroyed by lava flow in the Leilani Estates subdivision.

The loss is the latest outcome of a [series of earthquakes on beginning Friday afternoon](#), including a magnitude 6.9 on the Richter scale of 5.5 to 8.9, and the eruption of the island's most active volcano, Kilauea. Over 1,700 people have been forced to evacuate, according to [USA Today](#).

Shannon Takabayashi, an agent with Hilo Bay Realty, who had her first couple of homes in Leilani Estates, said she was in a restaurant in Hilo on Friday when the big earthquake struck. "The whole restaurant was silent, everyone just froze, there was rumbling, all the buildings shook." The restaurant quickly closed.



TWEET RT [@bclemms](#) Time Lapse of giant lava flow consuming car, telephone pole falling, Hawaii [pic.twitter.com/mELPKOCiQt](#) (via [@hidravlc](#))

As Inman went to press, [Hawaii News Now](#) was saying lava had claimed at least 35 structures on the Big Island.

According to the [Honolulu Star-Advertiser](#), the communities of Leilani Estates and Lanipuna Gardens, with roughly 700 homes and 1,800 residents, remained under mandatory evacuation orders due to the ongoing lava eruption and its dangerous volcanic gases.

Residents from Leilani Estates were anticipating being allowed to return to homes at 7 a.m. local time to pick up urgent items such as medication and important documents, but they were sent away again with the news that more fissures had opened up on the main Highway 130, leading to the road's closure.

Bill Parecki, a Realtor with Elite Pacific Properties based in nearby Kapoho, five miles south east of Leilani, meanwhile said a number of his neighbors had already evacuated, fearful of the lava flow coming their way. The water supply had also reportedly been cut off.

Coughing as he spoke to Inman by telephone, Parecki said he suffered from bronchitis and asthma and that he too was relocating to a second home in a Lava zone 3 (Leilani Estates is in a Lava zone 1 area).

“A lot of people have already vacated — that 6.9 earthquake scared a lot of people not rationally but emotionally,” he said.

Parecki told Inman he has one listing in Leilani Estates, a higher-end one in the \$560,000 price range on [Kaupili Street](#).

“I don’t know if that house is still standing,” he said. “Everything for sale in Leilani might be on the market, but I can’t imagine anything selling. You’d have to be a real risk taker to purchase anything.”

The sad thing is that the Leilani Estates subdivision was developed to provide a place for families who lost their homes in a previous eruption in the 1980s from another community, said Kehaulani Costa, executive officer of local trade association [Hawaii Island Realtors \(HIR\)](#).

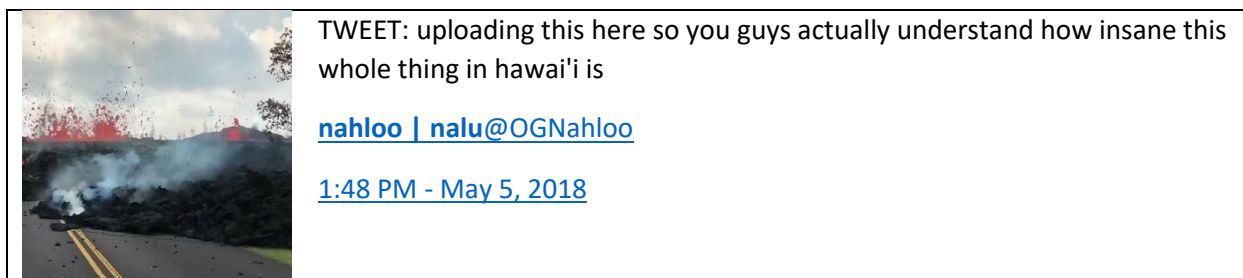
HIR swung into action on Friday, issuing advice on the insurance moratorium and helping agents and their clients with resources for emergency pet shelters. Today, the group is reaching out to members who live in the area and down slope to reach out to them and see what housing and storage needs there are.

For the real estate community watching on, Costa said any immediate donations at this point should go to the American Red Cross.

Costa was spreading the word about a central Facebook group, the [Big Island Lava Flow Housing Network](#), which was acting as a bulletin board for those offering shelter and those seeking it.

She was concerned about the rehousing situation, describing the housing market as very restricted with not a lot of inventory, neither as rentals or homes for sale.

She added: “For those residents and Realtors on our island not in an evacuation zone, the best things we can do is prepare our own homes, make our homes ready so we can best help others.”



She stressed that the areas experiencing the lava flow were still an isolated area and did not represent the whole state or the whole island.

There is a worry about the future for the Leilani Estates subdivision, she said. The agents who work there, work really hard to sell those \$250,000 properties, and there is real concern for their livelihoods, she said.

“We have amazing Realtors with a fantastic work ethic and community spirit. We have agents evacuating themselves who are (at the same time) helping their clients who have bought recently.”

[Email Gill South](#). Article image credited to U.S. Geological Survey via Getty Images.