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Local Kaua'i News by Wilma Lee Kapp  
2023 - Quarter 3 – September**

**Local Kaua'i News – Friday September 1, 2023**

A 47-year-old Līhu'e woman was admitted in serious condition to Wilcox Medical Center following a traffic crash in Līhu'e Wednesday afternoon. According to a preliminary investigation, at approximately 4 p.m., a Freightliner box truck operated by a 49-year-old male struck a female pedestrian on a marked crosswalk at the intersection of Kolopa Street and the delivery alley behind Līhu'e Safeway. The pedestrian suffered a leg injury. Speed and impairment do not appear to be factors in this crash.

The Kaua'i Police Department (KPD) is seeking the public's help in identifying three men captured on surveillance between August 22, 2023, and August 24, 2023, at various stores on Kaua'i. According to police, on Aug. 22, a visitor from Texas reported that his wallet was stolen while swimming at Po'ipū Beach Park. The male victim further reported that there were numerous charges from various stores and establishments on Kaua'i. KPD officers were able to recover surveillance footage from the various establishments and identified three male subjects as perpetrators conducting fraudulent charges. Anyone with information on the identity of the three suspects or with information on this reported incident is encouraged to contact KPD Detective Bobby Thompson at 808-241-1635

The Kaua'i Police Department (KPD) is also seeking the public's help in identifying a man captured on surveillance on Sunday, July 2, 2023, on the North Shore Preserve property in Hanalei. The man was captured on surveillance footage on the North Shore Reserve property carrying a white stand-up paddle board into the water, which was later reported stolen. Anyone with information on the identity of the suspect or with information on this reported incident is encouraged to contact KPD Detective Lucas Hamberg at 808-241-1707.

Surveillance photos of the suspects in both of the cases can be viewed on the Crime Stoppers Facebook. Those with information who wish to remain anonymous can provide information by submitting a tip at [cskauai.org](https://www.cskauai.org)

An independent third-party investigation into the August 8th wildfires on Maui is expected to take a year to complete. Hawaii Attorney General Anne Lopez says professional fire investigators will look into the policies and performances of the state and Maui County. On Thursday, Lopez announced the nonprofit Fire Safety Research Institute will handle the investigation. The team of investigators includes former firefighters, inspectors, fire scientists and incident commanders. They started work in Lahaina on August 24th. They will put together a timeline showing how state agencies coordinated emergency alerts, evacuations, firefighting, communications, and more.

An updated list of the people considered missing or unaccounted for following the deadly wildfire in Lahaina will be released today. The current list has 388 names. Governor Josh Green expects the total to drop significantly this time, possibly to the "lower double digits," and maybe even below 50. There are 115 people confirmed dead and 100-percent of the disaster area has been searched for remains.

Rental cars are piling up in a grassy field at the Kahului Airport. It's a sign of the major tourism decline Maui has seen since the deadly wildfire in Lahaina. Airport officials say the field housing the cars is

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usually empty, and rental cars haven't gone this unused since the height of the pandemic. The Hawaii Tourism Authority says Maui averaged less than 35-hundred visitors per day in August. That's half of the average from August of last year. Businesses are also struggling, with many now forced to start layoffs.

President Biden is asking Congress for another four-billion dollars for disaster relief. Biden requested almost 40-billion dollars in additional spending in early August, including 12-billion for FEMA's disaster relief fund. The White House Office of Management and Budget says it now needs a total of 16-billion dollars for the disaster relief fund after the recent sweeping disasters in Hawaii, Louisiana, and Florida.

The giant banyan tree in the center of Lahaina is showing hopeful signs of life after the wildfire that swept the town. According to the Department of Land and Natural Resources the tree is showing positive results thanks to preservation efforts from volunteers. Days after the fire, Maui arborists, landscapers and volunteers came together to water the tree and aerate it's roots to save any life that was left. Now, landscaper contractor Chris Imonti says there is new life in the roots and he thinks it's going to be fine with all the care they're giving it.

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**Local Kauaī News – Monday September 4, 2023**

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**Local Kauaïi News – Tuesday September 5, 2023**

Our Department of Parks and Recreation (DOPR) is announcing that County parking lots at Hanalei Bay will be temporarily closed on Sept. 6 and Sept. 7 from 5 to 10 a.m. The temporary closures are necessary for repairs of the parking lots. For questions or more information, please call 808-241-4460.

The state Department of Health is switching its ambulance provider on Maui and Kauai. Current operator AMR will be replaced by Falck. The company has faced backlash about its response times in California, and about its overtime policies. The DOH is also lowering its standard of care. That means paramedics are no longer required to be on most ambulances already staffed with EMTs. Paramedics have more training than EMTs. The DOH has not provided a reason for the switch.

An independent third-party investigation into the cause of the deadly Lahaina wildfire and the response by authorities has been going on for two weeks. The state Attorney General's Office has hired the nationally-recognized Fire Safety Research Institute out of Maryland. A team has been on the ground, interviewing survivors, first responders and local officials, as well as surveying damage. The goal of the investigation is to identify the cause of the fire, government missteps, and whether there was any criminal wrongdoing the state should look further into.

The Maui Police Department is encouraging people to file missing persons reports if they're still trying to contact a loved one after the August 8th wildfires. As of Monday, 110 missing persons reports have been filed. Forty-one cases are being actively investigated and are considered open. Governor Josh Green says 325 people are considered missing. That's down from the total of 385 people announced last Friday.

Experts say the economic impacts of the Lahaina wildfire could be felt for years to come. University of Hawaii economists believe tourism to Maui will take years to fully recover, although construction and federal aid money will help bridge the gap left behind by a lack of tourism. So far, visitor arrivals have dropped around 75-percent even as Maui workers plead with tourists not to cancel their upcoming trips.

Nearly a month after the wildfire in Lahaina, Hawaiian Electric is starting to re-energize lines in West Maui. This comes after the county emergency operations center gave HECO approval. Crews have already installed temporary poles with more coming in the next weeks. The company said they won't be releasing information yet on how long the re-energizing will take. HECO has been facing several lawsuits that claim their power lines started the nation's deadliest wildfire in a century. However, they say their lines were de-energized in the area at the time the flames started.

Maui County could have had extra federal funding to prevent wildfires in west Maui long before the Lahaina disaster happened. But, it dropped its request for a FEMA grant in 2021. County officials abandoned the effort after FEMA raised some concerns about their proposal. That's what FEMA and state staff who were involved in the grant application tell the Civil Beat. A former Hawaii Emergency Management Agency official says the money wouldn't have been enough to address all of the issues

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that make west Maui vulnerable to wildfires, but it could have gone toward protecting a "specific, high-threat area."

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**Local Kauaʻi News – Wednesday September 6, 2023**

The Kauaʻi Police Department (KPD) is asking for the public's help in locating a missing adult male. Joshua Zi-etz, age 53, of Kapaʻa, was reported missing on Tuesday, September 5, 2023. He was last seen at a family member's residence over a week ago and is known to frequent the Kīlauea to Kapaʻa areas. Zi-etz is 5 feet 10 inches tall, weighs approximately 185 pounds, and was last seen wearing a black tank top, black shorts, and sneakers. He has green eyes and gray shoulder-length hair. Anyone with information about Zi-etz's whereabouts on Kauaʻi is urged to call KPD Dispatch at 808-241-1711. Those wishing to remain anonymous can provide information at Crime Stoppers Kauaʻi [cskauai.org](http://cskauai.org)

The Hawaii Department of Health today reported six more COVID-19 deaths, bringing the toll in our state since the start of the pandemic to 2,001. Most of the deaths in the state have been among those ages 60 and older, but deaths have been recorded among all age groups, including among at least seven children. There has been a decline in the seven-day average of daily cases to 129, down from 170 the previous week, according to DOH.

Survivors of the Lahaina wildfire could soon be allowed to return to their properties. Maui County Mayor Richard Bissen says the final details of a plan are being worked out. Bissen says people will be allowed to return to their homes and businesses and take anything that's salvageable. After that, the debris cleanup process will begin.

Independent investigators haven't ruled out criminal wrongdoing in Lahaina. Interviews are currently being conducted as part of a year-long investigation into the devastating Maui wildfire. Governor Josh Green said it's important that all elements of the fire are fully understood, including if there were any government missteps. Steve Kerber with the team at the Fire Safety Research Institute, says he hopes to have a timeline ready in about three months. The following steps of the investigation will look at the response and future recommendations.

The fields surrounding the Kahului Airport are cluttered with an estimated 18-thousand rental cars. Most of the cars were in use before the Lahaina wildfire disaster. But, tourism has taken a steep decline in the past few weeks. Maui airport district officials say some of the cars will soon be shipped off the island. Rental car companies say they need to start reducing inventory on Maui. About three-thousand cars are currently being rented to people visiting Maui.

The Maui Police Department will only conduct formal searches for unaccounted for people in Lahaina if a missing person report is filed on their behalf. Anyone can file a missing person report, but they must leave a first and last name and contact information. Investigators usually ask where the person was last seen, then check places like hospitals and jails, or get in touch with the person's employer. People considered unaccounted for will eventually have their classifications changed to deceased through a legal process. That's if they're never found, or if their remains are never identified.

Hawaii is the only state without a fire marshal. Some fire officials are now calling for that to change after the destruction in Lahaina. Hawaii disbanded its fire marshal's office in 1979. In other states, the

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fire marshal often coordinates fire prevention strategies between local agencies. They also handle fire prevention and investigation in both urban and rural landscapes, regulate fire codes, and work to boost public awareness about risks. County fire departments have mostly been handling those responsibilities instead.

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**Local Kauaʻi News – Thursday September 7, 2023**

Our Kauaʻi Fire Department responded to a brush fire on Waimea Canyon Drive in Kōkeʻe Wednesday afternoon at about 3:30. The Kauaʻi Police Department closed Waimea Canyon Drive from Panini Place to Kōkeʻe Road. No structures were threatened. The fire was extinguished by 5 Pm and Waimea Canyon drive reopened to traffic.

An inmate is dead after a fight at the Halawa Correctional Facility that happened on Tuesday. According to officials, officers were doing a walk through headcount when they came across the two inmates fighting in a cell. One inmate was restrained while medical backup was called. Both inmates were taken to a hospital but one was released. The other passed away at the hospital on Wednesday afternoon. There is an investigation underway.

A 70-year-old Poʻipū man was admitted in critical condition to Wilcox Medical Center following a traffic crash in Poʻipū Thursday morning. At approximately 6:35 a.m., Kauaʻi Police were dispatched to a report of a traffic crash involving a bicyclist and a motor vehicle. A bicyclist traveling southbound on Nalo Road attempted to make a right turn onto Hoʻone Road. After overtaking a vehicle near the stop sign, the bicyclist collided with a Toyota Tacoma operated by a 24-year-old Hanapēpē male traveling eastbound on Hoʻone Road. Speed and impairment do not appear to be factors in this crash, the investigation remains ongoing. In addition, the junction of Hoʻone Road and Nalu Road was closed for approximately 2 hours while officers with the Traffic Safety Section conducted an on-scene investigation.

A federal official is promising to make sure displaced Lahaina residents aren't muscled off their land by real estate developers. Adrienne Todman, deputy secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, is visiting Maui this week. She's pledging to make sure Lahaina residents "hold onto their land." Todman also says the HUD and FEMA are working to prevent people from being put into a position where they are forced to sell their land.

Two new entities are being sued over the destruction of the West Maui wildfire. The state of Hawaii and Kamehameha Schools were named as the defendants in a new lawsuit. The lawsuit argues the landowners had lots of dry, poorly managed brush on their property that fueled the wildfire. All the defendants named in the case were aware of a 2014 report by the Hawaii Wildfire Management Organization that pointed out the large areas of non-native grass were extremely fire-prone. To date, there have been 15 lawsuits filed in state court regarding the wildfire.

The projected hit to Hawaii's economy after the Maui wildfires is one-point-nine-billion dollars through next year. That's according to the latest report from the state Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism. Hawaii is expected to lose 600-million dollars in previously expected growth this year alone. That number might nearly double next year. The previous statewide economic growth expectation for this year was one-point-eight-percent. The DBEDT has revised the figure to one-point-one-percent.

Cleanup is beginning in Lahaina Harbor. State and Federal officials began the cleanup process on

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Wednesday, dealing with dozens of boats damaged by the massive Maui wildfire. After the search of the harbor wrapped up last week, officials created a unified command led by the US Coast Guard to clean up the water. The command will assess, remove, and dispose of hazardous materials from local waters, including Lahaina Harbor. Authorities say it's too early to estimate how long the cleanup operations will take.

All of the Honolulu Department of Permitting and Planning employees convicted of taking bribes have been dealt with by the law. The final defendant in the scandal was sentenced to ten months in prison Wednesday. The woman admitted taking nearly 30-thousand dollars in cash bribes. In exchange, she sped up certain building permit applications. The woman worked as a building plans examiner.

Two Hawaii Island men are in custody after stealing over 75 pounds of oranges from a farm in Kalopa. According to prosecutors, 41-year-old Kellen Tolentino and 38-year-old Joshua Reding-Kellog are being charged with second-degree theft and criminal trespass. They could face up to five years in prison or four years of probation with up to 12 months in jail.

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**Local Kauaʻi News – Friday September 8, 2023**

Our Kauaʻi Fire Department firefighters extinguished a warehouse structure fire in Puhi on Hulemalu Road on Thursday. No injuries were reported. However, two dogs were recovered. No nearby structures were damaged. Firefighters were dispatched shortly after 1:15 p.m. Thursday. Upon arrival firefighters discovered a vacant warehouse fully engulfed in flames. As firefighters were fighting the blaze, personnel with Kauaʻi Island Utility Cooperative turned off power to the building. Damages to structure and contents are estimated at \$15,000. The cause of the fire remains under investigation. If anyone has information about this fire, please contact Acting Capt. Kennison Naga-hisa with the Kauaʻi Police Department at 808-241-1705

Hawaii's chief housing officer is resigning after less than a year on the job. Nani Medeiros announced her resignation on Thursday, after claiming to face threats and bullying. It follows an emergency proclamation on housing that was issued in mid-July. Critics viewed the proclamation as a way to give developers more power to complete projects without first addressing environmental and community concerns. Then, after the Lahaina wildfire, the proclamation sparked concerns about a possible land grab in west Maui. Medeiros says her loved ones have also been targets of false allegations and threats.

The list of unaccounted for individuals in the Lahaina fire has decreased significantly to include 66 people, down from 385, according to Gov. Josh Green. Green announced the updated number of unaccounted for people today. The number of fatalities remains at 115. There are still 41 missing persons reports that are being investigated by the Maui Police Department.

The state Department of Education will not release the number of students killed or considered missing after the Lahaina wildfire. The DOE says the number is so small, that doing so would violate the privacy of the students and their families. The DOE is still trying to get in contact with more than 500 families in its system after the fire, which happened one month ago today. It's unclear how many uncontacted students have moved away or enrolled in private schools.

Wildfire concerns on Oahu are growing after the Maui wildfires. In the past four weeks, Oahu's building inspectors have seen an influx of complaints from neighbors about landowners who haven't cleared overgrown brush. Before the August 8th fire, the Honolulu Department of Permitting and Planning was averaging 48 requests for investigations into overgrowth violations in a month. Since then, there have been 70 complaints, and 20 landowners have been issued violation notices.

West Maui may reopen to tourists in one month. Governor Josh Green has made a tentative decision to reopen the region to tourists on October 8th, in an effort to keep Maui's struggling economy afloat. Green attended the state Council on Revenues on Thursday, where he also announced a plan to direct 100-million-dollars in federal funding to families directly affected by the Lahaina wildfire. People who are at least 18-years-old will receive 12-hundred-dollars each.

Several questions remain unanswered one month after the fire that killed at least 115 people in Lahaina. No one has said who was calling the shots with Maui's top emergency management official off the island on August 8th. Maui County Mayor Richard Bissen has not said where he was or what

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he was doing on the night of the fire. And, no one in his administration has said why they waited until after the historic town had already burned to ask the state to send help. No government official or agency has directly taken responsibility for the fire or what many view as a failed response.

Hurricane Jova has weakened to a category three storm over the open waters of the east Pacific. The storm had sustained winds of 125-miles-per-hour on Thursday night. It is about 600 miles west-southwest of the southern tip of Baja California. The storm is moving to the west-northwest, but is not expected to make landfall in Hawaii. The National Hurricane Center expects Jova to diminish to a remnant low by Monday, before it even crosses into the Central Pacific.

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**Local Kauaʻi News – Monday September 11, 2023**

The IRS will be hosting a special Community Assistance Visit at the Lihue Library tomorrow Tue. Sept 12th thru Thurs Sept. 14 from 9AM to 3 PM daily . Taxpayers can get help with Account inquiries, Basic tax law, Payment arrangements and much more. Walk-ins are welcome but appointments can be made by calling 615-250-5328. Taxpayers must bring current state or government issued photo ID and relevant letters or notices to the appointment.

Kauaʻi Police are continuing their search for a suspect in connection with a homicide that occurred Thursday evening on Kahili Mountain Road. Chris Santos, 48, is wanted in this homicide investigation, and a warrant has been issued for his arrest. Santos is believed to still be on Kauaʻi. The public is advised to use extreme caution and not approach this individual. Santos is considered armed and dangerous. The homicide was reported Thursday, shortly before 10:45 p.m. The incident also involved a second victim, currently in stable condition. Anyone with information regarding this incident or the above mentioned individual is encouraged to contact KPD Dispatch at 808-241-1711. Those wishing to remain anonymous can provide information by submitting a tip at [cskauai.org](http://cskauai.org)

Thousands of displaced Maui residents are still living in hotels, more than a month after the wildfires. Governor Josh Green says about 66-hundred people are staying in 29 hotels, and another eleven-hundred people are temporarily living in Airbnb's. On Friday, Green said the state will continue to contract with three to five hotels and lease their entire properties during the recovery process. FEMA will continue to pay hotels serving as shelters until at least September 29th.

Public health officials are warning Lahaina survivors to use extreme caution once they are allowed to return to what's left of their properties. Doctor Diana Felton, state toxicologist for the Department of Health, is reminding people who want to go look for sentimental items in the rubble of the presence of toxic waste. Contaminants in the debris and ash may include asbestos, lead, and arsenic. Many of those hazardous materials may be present, since many of the buildings that were destroyed were built before 1970.

A Hawaii non-profit organization is offering training to help Lahaina wildfire evacuees assist with cleanup efforts. The Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement says it's will provide a free certification and job training courses starting this Friday. The CEO says they want to empower the Maui community by ensuring they're prepared to take on the job. The Maui Workforce Development Program will provide opportunities to those who lost their jobs as a result of the fires.

Kilauea is erupting for the second time this year. The latest eruption started at about 3:15 Sunday afternoon. Fountains of lava were seen shooting out of the summit crater. The U.S. Geological Survey has raised Kilauea's alert level to a warning. But, downslope communities are not believed to be facing any danger. The eruption comes after a long period of elevated seismic activity. The last eruption before this started in January and lasted through March. All activity was contained within the Hale-mau-mau Crater.

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**Local Kaua*ʻ*i News – Tuesday September 12, 2023**

Kauai police are still looking for a suspect in connection with a homicide. Forty-eight-year-old Chris Santos is wanted for the incident that happened on Thursday night on Kahili Mountain Road. Police believe he is still on Kauai and he is considered armed and dangerous. Anyone with information regarding this incident is encouraged to contact KPD Dispatch at 808-241-1711. Those wishing to remain anonymous can provide information to Crime Stoppers Kauai by submitting a tip at [cskauai.org](http://cskauai.org)

The U.S. Secretary of Energy says the government will help with community led rebuilding efforts in Maui. Jennifer Granholm visited the fire-ravaged areas of Maui yesterday and said she was moved by the resiliency of the community. The Hawaii governor said he's concerned about grid repairs because of the strong winds and dry climate. Granholm said the Biden's administration's 95 million dollar grant will harden Hawaii's electric grid and will help the state withstand future weather events.

China is allegedly behind a social media disinformation campaign about the cause of the deadly Lahaina [[ lah-HYE-nah ]] wildfire. That's according to a report from the New York Times on Monday. One of the false claims that's been circulating says the government was secretly testing a "weather weapon" on Lahaina. The same conspiracy theory circulated after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and other major weather-related natural disasters. Hawaii Congresswoman Jill Tokuda has condemned China, saying it is "weaponizing loss of life and tragedy for strategic or political gain."

Kilauea is erupting for the third time this year, and for the third time this year, it's drawing big crowds. Hawaii Volcanoes National Park has seen thousands of visitors since the lava started flowing Sunday afternoon. It's unclear how long people will get the opportunity to see the eruption this time. The January eruption lasted 61 days until March. The June eruption lasted just 12 days, ending June 19th. Officials are reminding people to be respectful of the sacred site, and to be safe.

A newly approved version of the COVID-19 vaccine will be available in Hawaii in a few days. The FDA approved the latest round of vaccines on Monday. The Hawaii Department of Health says it will likely be available on the islands beginning Thursday or Friday. People who have recently gotten COVID or have taken one of the previous versions of the vaccine are advised to wait two to three months before getting the newest version. These vaccinations will not be considered boosters.

The Department of Health says the state's mental health crisis line has seen a significant increase in calls after the wildfires in Lahaina. The D-O-H is still gathering data on how many people have sought out care either in person or by calling and should have a better sense of trends in the next couple of months. Behavioral Health Deputy Director Marina Tsuji said needs have increased and they expect "behavioral health needs to continue to grow as the community grieves." She added that grieving is a natural and understandable reaction to the loss that people have experienced and the emotions are not signs of a mental illness. Mental Health advocates are hoping more people seek care during this time. If you or someone you know needs emotional support, the Suicide Crisis line number is 9-8-8.

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**Local Kauaʻi News – Wednesday September 13, 2023**

The Kauaʻi Police Department has reopened Maʻalo Road by Wailua Falls and Kuamoʻo Road by the Wailua Reservoir after conducting an operation in connection with Chris Santos, a suspect in connection with a homicide. Those roads were closed between 6:40 and 9:15 this morning and was reopened after police cleared the area. Kauaʻi Police continue their search for the suspect, and thanks the community for their numerous tips relating to the suspect.

Kauaʻi Police have received reports of different individuals providing transportation to Chris Santos and would like to remind the public that any person who renders any type of assistance to Chris Santos is subject to prosecution for Hindering Prosecution in the First Degree, an offense punishable by up to 5 years in prison.

The public is advised to use extreme caution and not approach Santos who is 6 feet, 2 inches tall, and weighs 250 pounds. Anyone with information regarding the whereabouts of Chris Santos is encouraged to contact KPD Dispatch at 808-241-1711. Those wishing to remain anonymous can provide information by submitting a tip Crime Stoppers Kauaʻi to at [cskauai.org](https://www.cskauai.org)

The final death toll from the August 8th wildfire in Lahaina will likely be smaller than once feared. On Tuesday, the Maui Police Department announced the number of people considered unaccounted for is down to 41. Last Friday, the FBI's official list decreased from more than 300 to 66 names. The death toll remains at 115.

State leaders are revealing more of their plan to restart tourism in West Maui to boost the economy. Governor Josh Green said about 73-hundred people are currently staying in 32 hotel rooms across West Maui, and they're set to welcome tourist again in less than four weeks. The decision is causing concern for some residents, wondering what will happen to the wildfire survivors who are currently staying in the hotels. State leaders say most of them will be relocated to longer-term housing like Airbnb's. Governor Green is expecting West Maui to return to at least 20-percent of it's pre-fire tourism levels.

A newly approved version of the COVID-19 vaccine will be available in Hawaii in a few days. The FDA approved the latest round of vaccines on Monday. The Hawaii Department of Health says it will likely be available on the islands beginning Thursday or Friday. People who have recently gotten COVID or have taken one of the previous versions of the vaccine are advised to wait two to three months before getting the newest version.

Hundreds of current and former paramedics and EMTs are suing the city and county of Honolulu. The group of more than 240 people says it wasn't paid overtime for three years. The class-action lawsuit blames the city for failing to properly track and calculate overtime hours. The lawsuit was initially filed last September, but more paramedics and EMTs were recently added. The workers say they weren't paid on time, and in some cases, still haven't been paid for putting in overtime hours.

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**Local Kauaʻi News – Thursday September 14, 2023**

The Hawaiʻi Department of Transportation (HDOT) is notifying motorists of upcoming closures for the week of Sept. 18, on Kūhiō Highway (Route 560) as part of the Hanalei Hill Slope Stabilization project. A single lane closure on Kūhiō Highway will be needed in the vicinity of the Hanalei Plantation Road and the Hanalei Bridge, beginning Monday, Sept. 18 through Friday, Sept. 22 from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Traffic in both directions will be maintained using alternating traffic control. Flaggers will be staged at either end of the work area.

The manhunt continues for a suspect accused of murder on Kauai. Forty-eight-year-old Chris Santos is wanted in connection to a deadly shooting that happened on Thursday night on Kahili Mountain Road. There is a warrant for his arrest. The victim was 28-year-old Kith Silva Lacro from Kalaheo. There was also a second victim who is reportedly in stable condition. Authorities believe Santos is still on Kauai. He's described as six-foot-two and about 250 -pounds.

A shareholder is suing the Hawaiian Electric Company and its board of directors. The person says the board's negligence contributed to the deadly wildfire in Lahaina. Several current and former board members are named in the lawsuit, including Scott Seu, the president and CEO of HECO's parent company, Hawaiian Electric Industries. The shareholder claims the board prioritized profits over safety and refused to make urgent repairs to electrical infrastructure before it was too late.

The US Small business Administration Has opened an SBA Business Recover Center in Kapaʻa To provide services to small businesses impacted by the Maui Wildfires. The center is located in the Kauai Federal Credit Union's new community space in Kapaʻa which was previously occupied by Otsuka Furniture. There is a wide range of services and an SBA representative will be available to meet with each small business and explain how an SBA disaster loan can help finance their Recovery. The Center is open Monday thru Saturday 9AM to 6PM. Services are provided free of charge and no appointment is necessary.

The Honolulu Police Department is investigating an incident where several UHaul trucks caught fire in the Ma puna puna area this morning. It happened at around 4 a.m. near Nimitz Highway. Firefighters arrived to the scene to find six UHaul trucks on fire in between two buildings. Authorities are investigating what exactly caused the fire.

The number of COVID cases being reported in Hawaii continues to rise. The Department of Health says there were 12-hundred new cases last week, with close to 900 of them on Oahu. Hawaii is averaging 134 daily cases and has a positivity rate of more than 13-percent. Deaths are also on the rise, with COVID claiming eight lives on the islands last week.

Hawaii's pharmacies are starting to get shipments of the newly approved COVID vaccine, which targets the latest Omicron variants. CVS Pharmacy, which operates Longs Drugs, started getting the vaccine on Wednesday and says it will keep getting shipments this week. The shots are expected to be offered to the public by early next week. Public health officials are encouraging all Hawaii residents who are at least six months old to get the newest version of the vaccine.

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**Local Kaua'i News – Friday September 15, 2023**

Kaua'i Police continue their search for 48-year-old Chris Santos, who's wanted in a homicide that occurred on Sept. 7 on Kahili Mountain Road. Kaua'i Police have received reports of different individuals providing transportation to Chris Santos and would like to remind the public that any person who renders any type of assistance to Chris Santos is subject to prosecution for Hindering Prosecution in the First Degree, an offense punishable by up to 5 years in prison. The public is advised to use extreme caution and not approach Santos who is 6 feet, 2 inches tall, and weighs 250 pounds and is considered armed and dangerous. Anyone with information regarding the whereabouts of Chris Santos is encouraged to contact KPD Dispatch at 808-241-1711. Those wishing to remain anonymous can provide information by submitting a tip Crime Stoppers Kaua'i to at [cskauai.org](https://www.cskauai.org)

A Kauai man has been sentenced behind bars Wednesday after pleading guilty to sexually assaulting a teenager. Ty Nakamoto, 30, of Kapa'a has pled guilty to second-degree sex assault and was sentenced to 10 years in prison. Investigators said the 30-year-old met the 13-year-old victim through a dating app last year and sexually assaulted the minor at the minor's home.

A congressional committee will hold a hearing on Capitol Hill to examine the deadly wildfires on Maui. The hearing will investigate the Hawaiian Electric Company's role in the fires. The U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee wants HECO's CEO and utility regulators in Washington D.C. for a hearing on September 28th. It marks the sixth investigation into the disaster announced so far.

Today The Maui Police Department and the FBI gave a follow-up into the progress of their unaccounted-for list and identifying Lahaina wildfire victims. During their update, the Maui police announced a change in confirmed fatalities in the Lahaina fire stating that the death toll is now at 97. Initially, the number was at 115. MPD said the revision came after forensic tests recognized duplicates in DNA samples.

Residents will be allowed to return to Lahaina to see the remnants of their properties beginning September 25th. Authorities will be escorting residents and business owners through fire-ravaged areas. The Maui Emergency Management Agency says people will be provided with respirators and special suits because of the risk of exposure to toxic ash and other hazardous materials like lead and asbestos. Residents will also be instructed on how to properly sift through debris while limiting their exposure to toxic ash. The August 8th wildfire displaced more than seven-thousand people.

Governor Josh Green is assuring displaced west Maui residents that they won't be left without housing once tourists return. Most of west Maui, except for Lahaina, is scheduled to reopen on October 8th. Green says displaced people are being moved into longer-term housing, like Airbnb's. Green adds that the number of hotels sheltering people will be consolidated. The governor says the goal is to get people to 18 months of housing and make sure no one who lost their home is left without a roof over their head.

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**Local Kauaʻi News – Monday September 18, 2023**

Wanted homicide suspect Chris Santos of Kauaʻi, sustained injuries following an officer involved shooting with federal law enforcement Sunday night. Santos has been wanted by police since Sept. 8, for the fatal shooting of 28-year-old Kith Silva-Lacro of Kalāheo that occurred on Thursday, Sept. 7, on Kahili Mountain Road. The Kauaʻi Police Department, United States Marshals Service, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation had been engaged in an on-going operation to locate and safely apprehend Santos.

On Sept. 17, at approximately 10:20 p.m., officers located Santos operating a motor vehicle in the vicinity of the Kekaha Beach Park. Santos was transported to Wilcox Hospital for treatment, where he currently remains.

Kaumualiʻi Highway at mile marker 27 is closed for travel in both directions until further notice due to the on-going investigation. PMRF employees with proper identification are being allowed through via a detour, all others are encouraged to avoid the area. This event remains under active investigation.

Thousands of people believe the state's planned date of October 8th is too soon to reopen west Maui to tourists. A petition urging the state to cancel that plan has received 36-hundred signatures as of late Sunday, all signed within less than 24 hours. The plan is to reopen the area from Kaanapali to Kapalua in less than three weeks. Lahaina will remain closed to visitors. Governor Josh Green's office says, come October 8th, no one who qualified for housing assistance will be booted out of hotels. About 75-hundred displaced residents are staying at 40 hotels across Maui. Meanwhile, more than ten-thousand Maui residents are currently unemployed.

Kilauea is no longer erupting. The U.S. Geological Survey announced the end of the latest eruption on Sunday, one week after it started at the summit crater. The alert level has been downgraded to a watch. This was Kilauea's third eruption of the year. The previous one, in June, lasted 12 days.

Governor Josh Green is in New York representing Hawaii at the United Nations summit. During the weekend, Green addressed world leaders, discussing climate change and the Maui wildfires. Green noted how Hawaii experienced a total of six fire disasters between 1953 and 2003, and then six total fire disasters last month alone. He also promoted the role of local government in sustainable development.

Hawaii is offering healthcare workers with ties to the state up to 50-thousand-dollars in annual loan repayments. But, that's only if they commit to working at least two years on the islands. Earlier this year, the state legislature approved an unprecedented 30-million-dollars in funding for the loan payments. The goal is to keep healthcare workers from Hawaii home and entice those who left to return home for work. It's called the "Come on Home Program." Hawaii is still in need of about four-thousand healthcare workers. The greatest needs are on the neighbor islands and in rural Oahu.

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**Local Kauaï News – Tuesday September 19, 2023**

Kauai homicide suspect Chris Santos was apprehended driving a stolen vehicle in the vicinity of Kekaha Beach Park, late Sunday night according to KPD Chief of Police Todd Raybuck. In a news conference this morning, Kauai police, FBI officers and U.S. Marshals had been scouring the county for Santos. Santos had been on the run since Sept. 8, when he allegedly fatally shot Kith Silva-Lacro, 28, of Kalaheo. Chief Raybuck said an officer opened fire on Santos as he “drove dangerously, erratically in the direction of law enforcement officers.” The car then veered off the road and plowed into a light pole. Santos suffered one gunshot wound and was transported to Wilcox Hospital, where he currently remains. Two rifles were located just outside of the vehicle as the tactical team moved in to arrest Santos. A female passenger in the vehicle was released pending investigation. Santos has been charged with Attempted Murder in the First Degree, Murder in the Second Degree and firearms offenses. The investigation continues in order to determine who may have aided Santos. Those individuals could face federal charges of hindering prosecution. Chief Raybuck said that Santos had an extensive criminal history, had a history of evading police and was recently released from federal custody..

Despite losing their homes and businesses in last month's wildfire, property owners in Lahaina still have to make their mortgage payments. Advocates, attorneys and homeowners are calling on banks to give residents a break. Some local and national banks are letting property owners delay mortgage payments, but as it stands, only for a few months. And, interest will still accumulate during that time.

The state Department of Education is still trying to get in contact with 191 students since the wildfires in west Maui. The DOE has made contact with 94-percent of the three-thousand students who were pre-registered for school in Lahaina this year. Among them, 957 students have transferred to another school within the DOE, 958 have applied for distance learning, and 267 have transferred to a public charter school or private school.

Some displaced Lahaina residents are being forced to move again. Hotels temporarily housing survivors are reshuffling their available rooms ahead of the planned reopening of tourism in west Maui on October 8th. One man who has been staying at the Sands of Kahana Resort tells KHNL-TV he recently got a letter from the company that manages the resort, telling him he needs to be out of his unit by the end of September. He was offered other so-called "housing opportunities," but was warned they might no longer be available after the end of October.

Hawaii House Speaker Scott Saiki wants the state to crack down on fundraising scams connected with the Maui wildfires. On Monday, Saiki sent a letter to Governor Josh Green, urging him to issue an emergency proclamation banning and criminalizing fraudulent fundraising. Saiki is also asking state Attorney General Anne Lopez to begin an auditing process to make sure money raised for wildfire victims actually gets to them. In a recent interview, Saiki said he has heard anecdotes about some organizations having questionable fundraising activities.

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**Local Kaua*ʻ*i News – Wednesday September 20, 2023**

University of Hawaii President David Lassner is announcing his retirement. Lassner will step down at the end of 2024, calling the decision "both personal and professional." Lassner told the U.H. Board of Regents of his retirement plan on Tuesday. He has led Hawaii's ten-campus public university system for more than a decade.

The University of Hawaii is offering full scholarships to all Lahainaluna High School seniors. In an effort to support students during the wildfire recovery, the UH will cover tuition, fees, books, and supplies for full and part-time students at any of their ten campuses. School officials say the initial scholarship is for one year while they look for funding to extend them for up to four years.

Maui County Mayor Richard Bissen has not publicly answered questions about the wildfires since a news briefing on August 29th. He also didn't appear when two significant announcements were made last week. One was about the ongoing search for people who remain missing, and the other was about the county's plan to allow displaced residents back into the burn zone to see their properties. When Bissen last attended a news conference three weeks ago, he was not able to answer a question about where he was and who was in charge as Lahaina burned. Bissen's spokesperson, Mahina Martin, says the mayor is busy and not trying to dodge questions from the media.

More than six weeks after the deadly wildfire in Lahaina, there are still discrepancies between the official narrative and eyewitness accounts. Some people say their vehicles were directed away from escape routes because of downed powerlines. But, Hawaiian Electric has maintained that its lines were de-energized more than six hours before the fire started to quickly spread through the historic town. The utility adds that it wasn't aware of any of its vehicles or crews blocking roads or evacuation routes. The Maui Police Chief says his officers tried to keep people away from downed powerlines because they believed the lines were still electrified.

The U.S. Navy is accused of "recklessly destroying" evidence following the Red Hill water crisis. That's according to attorneys representing families who were sickened after using tap water contaminated with jet fuel in 2021. A motion, introduced in court on Tuesday, says the Navy got rid of text and phone records from two key officials. They are Captain James "Gordie" Meyer, who was the commander of Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Hawaii, and Captain Erik Spitzer, who was the commander of Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam. Meyer allegedly had his iPhone wiped of its texts, voicemails and call logs during a so-called "tech support incident" in the spring of 2022. Spitzer's official command phone was allegedly wiped as well after he retired in June of 2022.

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**Local Kauaʻi News – Thursday September 21, 2023**

Kauaʻi Police have arrested Tiannah Iida, age 40, in connection with the Chris Santos investigation. She was arrested, Sept. 19, and charged with Hindering Prosecution in the First Degree, a felony offense punishable by up to five years in prison. Police believe that Iida rendered assistance to homicide suspect Santos. “Even though Chris Santos is in custody, this operation is not over,” said U.S. Marshals Service Hawaiʻi U.S. Marshal William Jessup. “The U.S. Marshals Task Force will continue to be here on the island with KPD to investigate and apprehend all individuals who helped and aided Santos while on the run. It might be today, tomorrow, next week, or next month; just know we will be coming for you.” On Sept. 17, officers located and arrested Mr. Santos in the vicinity of the Kekaha Beach Park, ending a 10-day search that included assistance from the United States Marshals Service and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Anyone with information regarding this investigation is encouraged to contact KPD Dispatch at 808-241-1711. Those wishing to remain anonymous can provide information by contacting Crime Stoppers Kauaʻi at [cskauai.org](http://cskauai.org)

Mitchell Peralto who was convicted in the 1997 kidnapping and murder of 23-year-old Kimberly Washington-Cohen here on Kauai has been re-sentenced. On Wednesday, he was sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole for the murder, and to 20 years in prison for the kidnapping. The sentences were the same as what the man received the first time, but he will now serve them one after the other instead of at the same time. The re-sentencing follows a 2018 state Supreme Court ruling in an unrelated case. The man and his ex-wife, Monica Alves Peralto kidnapped and killed the victim because they thought she was a police informant. Alves Peralto was re-sentenced in 2021 to the same imprisonment terms that Peralto was sentenced to today.

Some Lahaina residents will be allowed to return to their properties early next week. It will be the first time residents are let back in since the devastating wildfire on August 8th. On Monday and Tuesday, disaster restrictions will be lifted for owners and residents with vehicle passes in Zone 1C. The restrictions will be lifted between eight a.m. and four p.m. on each day. Reentry vehicle passes will be distributed beginning tomorrow.

Lahaina residents are being urged to wear proper personal protective equipment when visiting their properties. The first escorted visits will begin early next week. Experts say people are facing serious health risks due to toxic chemicals in the burn zone that they may breathe in or touch. Doctor Craig Downs says the ash people will be sifting through to find valuables is carcinogenic. And, some toxins could be present as far as three inches down into the soil and dirt.

The firing of a Honolulu deputy prosecutor could jeopardize several cases awaiting trial. The former prosecutor, fired Tuesday, is accused of showing crime scene photos and other confidential information from active cases at public presentations. The presentations were meant to teach kupuna about protecting themselves. The prosecutor worked for the Elder Abuse Unit, which is handling several cases, including the high-profile murder of 73-year-old Gary Ruby. Ruby's body was found encased in concrete at his home in Hawaii Loa Ridge. The Elder Abuse Unit has since put a new deputy prosecutor in charge of that case and others.

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**Local Kauaʻi News – Friday September 22, 2023**

Governor Josh Green is trying to calm fears about the planned reopening of west Maui to visitors on October 8th. On Thursday, Green said the eight-thousand fire evacuees staying in temporary housing, like hotels, won't be displaced. But, earlier this week, some people staying at hotels received letters from hotel management warning them they'd have to relocate by the end of the month. The American Red Cross also says some people may need to move to different hotels. Green however, says he doesn't think anyone will be forced to move. FEMA is offering evacuees 18 more months of housing assistance.

Maui Police say 22 people are still unaccounted for after the Lahaina wildfires on Aug. 8, 2023. The police department on Friday released its fifth list of names for people still missing. The department says the list only includes people for whom MPD missing persons reports have been filed. If you believe someone is still unaccounted for and should be added to the list, call MPD at 808-244-6400 .

Just five months after the devastating Lahaina wildfire, the PGA Tour will return to Maui in January. The Sentry Tournament of Champions will be held in Kapalua, January fourth through the seventh. Last month, PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan said he hoped the tournament would be a source of inspiration for Lahaina, which is located only ten miles away.

The majority of Native Hawaiians now live outside of Hawaii. That's according to newly released data from the U.S. Census Bureau. The 2020 U.S. Census showed less than 47-percent of Native Hawaiians or part Hawaiians lived in the state. That's down from 55-percent in 2010. In June, the Council For Native Hawaiian Advancement held its annual convention in Las Vegas. It was the first time the convention had ever been held outside of Hawaii.

The Hawaiʻi Department of Transportation (HDOT) informs Kauaʻi residents that pavement reconstruction and resurfacing work of Kūhiō Highway (Route 56) between Keālia Road and the Donkey Beach parking lot will switch to daytime closures beginning Monday, Oct. 9. A single lane closure on Kūhiō Highway (Route 56) in the northbound direction, beginning Monday, Oct. 9 through Friday, Oct. 13 from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. is needed to address safety concerns. Crews will pave over the milled surface of the northbound lane during the closure. The paving was originally scheduled for night work, but the project has been shifted to daytime work in regard to Shearwater fledgling season which started Sept. 15.

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**Local Kauaʻi News – Monday September 25, 2023**

Our Kauaʻi Police Department have identified a 66-year-old male who died at Wai-poʻo Falls in Kōkeʻe on Friday as Mark Debarr of California. According to a preliminary report, first responders received a report of a male falling off Waipoʻo Falls Trail shortly after 10:10 a.m. Friday. The hiker apparently fell off the trail and was located approximately 120 feet below the Wai-poʻo Falls. Foul play is not suspected in Mr. Debarr's death, and an autopsy is pending.

The Department of Health is passing out personal protective equipment to Lahaina residents going into the burn zone today. This comes as those who lived in Zone IC are being escorted to see what's left of their homes. Dr. Lorrin Pang with the Maui DOH says personal protective equipment is meant to keep people safe as they go into buildings. The department's biggest concern is possible long-term health risks from exposure to toxic dust or soot. Dr. Pang said that residents should "read what happened after 9/11," saying "they thought there would not be long-term side effects" but tons of people who worked that day ending up getting cancer.

Honolulu police are on the hunt for the person or people who shot four victims in Waianae. Saturday's shooting at the Waianae Boat Harbor left two people dead and two others injured. One of the surviving victims, a 21-year-old woman, is in critical condition. Detectives believe the shooting was not a random attack. A suspect was spotted fleeing the scene in a dark-colored vehicle.

Honolulu EMS is partially blaming COVID-19 after temporarily taking nine of its 21 ambulances out of commission. The ambulances were off the road during Sunday's midnight shift. Honolulu EMS Director Doctor Jim Ireland says there were low staffing levels caused by COVID infections. Planned vacations and on-the-job injuries were other reasons for the staffing shortage. Five ambulances remained out of use on Sunday afternoon.

Hawaii Democrat Jill Tokuda says she hopes this week's Congressional hearing on the Maui wildfires is "productive." Tokuda said that she hopes the House Energy and Commerce Committee is looking to learn how to help residents on the ground, as well as how to prevent such a tragedy in the future. The hearing takes place this Thursday. Hawaiian Electric Company, the Public Utilities Commission and the State Energy Office are all set to appear.

Some of the lawsuits that have been filed after the Maui wildfires challenge state and county regulations about invasive grasses. Lawyers argue allowing invasive grass to grow uncontrolled on someone's property is the legal equivalent to keeping radioactive waste, dynamite, or a dangerous wild animal on a property. One lawsuit names large landowners, including Kamehameha Schools and the West Maui Land Company, saying they failed to control vegetation on their properties, allowing the wildfires to quickly spread. Lawyer Ken Kasdan compares the fields of grasses on Maui to a stick of dynamite, saying they're both "ready to explode."

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**Local Kauaʻi News – Tuesday September 26, 2023**

Kauaʻi Fire Department firefighters extinguished a 12-acre brush fire early Monday morning. No injuries were reported, and no structures were damaged. According to a preliminary report, KFD personnel arrived on the scene and discovered 12 acres of brush on fire, which included over 40 abandoned vehicles, tires, and trash. While firefighters were positioned along Pili-poli Road to defend homes from the fire, KPD personnel advised those living along the road to evacuate as a precaution. The cause of the fire remains under investigation. Arson is suspected, according to reports. If anyone has information about the fire, contact Acting Capt. Kennison Naga-hisa with the Kauaʻi Police Department at 808-241-1705. If anyone witnesses illegal dumping, please call KPD Dispatch at 808-241-1711.

Lahaina residents are returning to see what's left of their properties for the first time since the deadly fire on August 8th. Escorted visits into the burn zone began Monday, in an area designated Zone 1C. About a dozen homes were destroyed in that area. One family says they found a few mementos in the rubble, including jewelry, plates and rare coins. Visits to the zone continue today.

A price freeze for essential goods and services on Maui is still in place, but less items are now on the list. The state Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs updated its price freeze policy on Monday. Food, water, ice, essential childcare products, over-the-counter medicine and hygiene products remain on the list of items in which retailers are not allowed to change prices for. The price freeze was first issued on August 9th, a day after the deadly fires, to prevent price gouging during an emergency period. It will remain in place until at least November 6th.

The University of Hawaii at Manoa is launching a Red Hill Information Hub. It's being described as a "one stop shop of the latest information, data and tools that can also be used for education, communication and research." The launch comes as the military prepares to start draining the Navy's underground Red Hill fuel storage facility next month. In a news release, the university said the hub includes the latest state Department of Health water monitoring reports, health surveys, and news. More information can be found at [redhill.hawaii.edu](http://redhill.hawaii.edu)

On Oahu An 18-year-old man is behind bars in connection with a shooting that left two people dead and two others wounded at the Waianae Boat Harbor. The man was arrested Monday, two days after the shooting. Police say the suspect was also injured in the incident, but it's unclear how. He was taken to a hospital in stable condition. One of the surviving victims, a 21-year-old woman, is in critical condition.

A pediatrician who works on Oahu is accused of sexual assault and misconduct against the mothers of his patients. Ten women have made similar accusations against Doctor Gregory Yim after seeing him with their children at Windward Pediatrics in Kaneohe. Five of the mothers have filed a civil suit against Yim, with the other five accusers expected to join the claim. Court records say Yim offered to treat the women for weight loss. He is also accused of improperly diagnosing the women with ADD and prescribing them Adderall to treat it.

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**Local Kauaʻi News – Wednesday September 27, 2023**

An unidentified woman has died following a traffic crash in Līhuʻe Wednesday morning. At approximately 4:50 a.m. Wednesday, KPD and Kauaʻi Fire Department personnel were dispatched to a report of a traffic crash involving a motor vehicle and pedestrian near mile marker 2.5 on Kapule Highway in Līhuʻe. According to a preliminary report, a 34-year-old female of Kapaʻa operating a box truck traveling northbound on Kapule Highway collided with a female pedestrian walking in the middle of the northbound lane. While the driver was uninjured, American Medical Response personnel pronounced the unidentified woman dead at the scene. Kapule Highway between Ahukini Road and Kūhiō Highway was closed in both directions for approximately 2 hours while the Kauaʻi Police Department's Traffic Safety Section conducted an on-scene investigation. Speed and alcohol do not appear to be factors in the crash at this time. However, the investigation remains ongoing, and toxicology reports are pending. This is the third traffic-related fatality on Kauaʻi this year.

Nearly all of the people confirmed dead in the Lahaina wildfire have now been publicly identified. Six more names were released on Tuesday, taking the total to 89 out of the 97 confirmed deaths. The people most recently identified were all Lahaina residents between the ages of 30 and 64. Authorities say one more person has been positively identified, but their family has not yet been contacted.

Maui Mayor Bissen has released the timeline for the reopening of West Maui to visitors. There will be three phases to give residents impacted by the wildfires more time to address housing options. Phase one begins on October 8th and includes the opening of the Ritz-Carlton, Maui Kapalua to Khana Villa. Phase two will start after phase one has been assessed and includes the Mahinahina to Maui Kaanapali Villas. The majority of displaced residents are located from the Royal Lahaina Resort to the Hyatt Regency, and they'll be included in phase three.

The Department of Education is announcing the plan to get Lahaina schools back to their campuses. On Tuesday, a spokesperson for the department announced schools will return to campus after the fall break, on October 16th. Professional cleaning crews will come through all campuses before the students return. Parents will receive bus and school schedule information through their email.

On Oahu One of the two people killed in last weekend's shooting at the Waianae Boat Harbor is now identified as a suspect. Honolulu police say the 19-year-old man shot at two people before he was shot to death early Saturday. A second, surviving suspect, an 18-year-old man, was arrested. Two people were killed and two others were wounded. One of the surviving victims, a 21-year-old woman, remains in critical condition.

The state of Hawaii and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are planning to build a temporary replacement for an elementary school destroyed by the wildfire in Lahaina. The plan calls for opening the new King Kamehameha the Third Elementary School site by January. The five-million-dollar temporary school will be built on eight acres of land in the planned community of Pulelehua. It's next to the planned location of a future permanent school. The three other schools in Lahaina, which were not damaged by flames, are expected to reopen during the week of October 16th.

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A potential federal government shutdown would not affect the Navy's plans to defuel its Red Hill fuel storage facility. That's according to the top officer in charge of the defueling operation. Late Monday, Vice Admiral John Wade announced that the Secretary of Defense has exempted all personnel supporting the defueling of Red Hill from furlough. And, all contracts related to the operation are staying in place. More than 100-million-gallons of jet fuel sit in the underground facility that's just 100 feet above a critical aquifer.

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**Local Kaua*ʻ*i News – Thursday September 28, 2023**

A Congressional hearing investigating the cause of the deadly wildfire in Lahaina started today. The hearing, conducted by the House Committee on Energy and Commerce is investigating whether electrical infrastructure played a role in the fire that killed 97 people on August 8th. The top officials from the Hawaiian Electric Company, the Hawaii Public Utilities Commission, and the Hawaii State Energy Office have been called to testify.

During the hearing The head of utility Hawaiian Electric defended the decision not to cut power to power lines that may have sparked last month's deadly wildfire. Hawaiian Electric CEO Shelee Kimura said a pre-emptive shutdown of power lines ahead of strong winds was not part of the utility's protocol. She acknowledged downed powerlines caused a small fire in the morning that was eventually extinguished, but claimed the cause of a second fire later in the day has yet to be determined.

Millions of dollars in grant awards are going towards youth mental health. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services made the announcement today. They said the money will be distributed across various states, including Hawaii. All together the state is receiving over four million dollars, which will be used to expand on mental health services in schools, and improve access to mental health prevention and treatment for children. The funding was a step in President Biden's Unity Agenda.

The reopening of tourism in West Maui will happen in phases. Maui County Mayor Richard Bissen announced the staggered reopening plan on Wednesday. It will begin on October 8th, with the northernmost resort area of Kapalua. The staggered approach was developed by county leaders and the Lahaina Advisory Team. Bissen says it will account for the housing needs of the nearly eight-thousand survivors displaced by the August 8th wildfire. Many of them are temporarily living in places usually occupied by tourists, including hotels and short-term rental units.

Hawaii emergency officials are allowed to activate sirens to warn people in the event of a wildfire. The Hawaii Emergency Management Agency clarified that fact on Wednesday, following a review of outdoor warning siren protocols. Like a tsunami or earthquake, fire is considered an official hazard that can prompt siren activation. The agency says its statewide network of sirens is an all-hazard system that tells people to "seek more information" when sounded. Maui emergency management officials' decision not to sound sirens during the wildfire that destroyed Lahaina has been heavily criticized since the August 8th disaster.

Hawaii's Hokulea voyage boat is coming home early. It's currently in the San Francisco Bay Area for the first time in 28 years. The Polynesian Voyaging Society said the boat will return to the islands in late December instead of continuing on it's route through the Pacific. CEO Nainoa Thompson said the decision comes in wake of the Maui wildfires.

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**Local Kauaī News by Wilma Lee Kapp**  
**2023 - Quarter 3 – September**

**Local Kauaī News – Friday September 29, 2023**

Our Kauai Department of Public Works Solid Waste Division announces that the Hanapēpē refuse transfer station will be closed on Saturday, Sept. 30. The closure is necessary for crews to haul green waste. For the safety of crew members of the public during the green waste hauling, all services will be closed on Saturday. The Hanapēpē refuse transfer station will reopen on Sunday, Oct. 1. Residents are advised to use the Kekaha Landfill during the closure.

A congressional hearing on the Lahaina wildfires isn't giving lawmakers many answers. Thursday's hearing focused on the role the city's electrical grid played in the disaster. Officials for Hawaiian Electric say the utility isn't responsible for clearing dry brush or other vegetation on private property, even if it is directly underneath power lines. When asked if the electrical grid was properly maintained at the time of the fire, officials revealed two-thousand of the company's wooden power poles hadn't been tested for termites or damage in a decade. Hawaiian Electric argued it was a combination of many organizations and people that led to the wildfires.

A 16-year-old boy accused of killing two people and injured 3 others at a chicken fight in Maili in April will be tried as an adult. On Thursday, Shaedan Styles Kealii was booked and charged with two counts of murder, attempted murder and multiple firearms offenses. Kealii is being held on \$2 million bail.

The Navy is censuring three retired officers who were in leadership positions at the time of the 2021 Red Hill fuel spill. On Thursday, Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro said the three retired officers were sent letters of censure for "leadership failings." The retired officers have not been identified. Kristina Baehr, an attorney representing families sickened by the contaminated water, is demanding more accountability from the Navy, and wants it to discipline officials who were involved with the fuel spill.

Tourism-related numbers have significantly dropped in the aftermath of the Maui wildfires. A new round of data was released by the Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism on Thursday. In August, visitor arrivals on Maui fell by 58-percent, and visitor spending fell by 49-percent. A few more than 112-thousand people visited Maui in August, the lowest total since February of 2021. And, visitors spent less than 247-million-dollars on Maui last month, the lowest total since March of 2021.

Residents who used their own hoses to help fight the wildfires on Maui are now getting hit with high water bills. That's despite Maui's top water official saying the county would be lenient and forgive some bills, or at least offer relief. Some Kula residents say their August water bills more than doubled from July. Many residents did what they could to help knock down flames while firefighters were overwhelmed with responsibilities in Lahaina and in other parts of west Maui that burned on August 8th.