

Hawaiian Volcano Erupts, Forcing Hundreds to Flee Their Homes

Hundreds of people on Hawaii's Big Island were ordered to evacuate their homes after the Kilauea Volcano erupted, belching ash into the sky and spewing fountains of lava in a residential area, officials said on Friday.

The volcano, one of five on the island, erupted on Thursday after a series of earthquakes over the last couple of days, including a 5.0 tremor earlier in the day, the U.S. Geological Survey reported on its website.

Residents in the Puna communities of Leilani Estates and Lanipuna Gardens subdivisions, home to about 1,700 people, were ordered to evacuate after public works officials reported steam and lava spewing from a crack, according to the county's Civil Defense Agency.

One local, Michael Hale, told the Honolulu Star-Advertiser he saw lava bursting from the fissure just two blocks from his home and business, Hale Hale Hostel and Vacation Rentals.

"I looked around and asked myself 'What's valuable?,'" he told the newspaper. "In that moment, nothing looked valuable. I filled the (truck) cab with mostly junk and that was it."

Two emergency shelters were opened to take in evacuees, the Civil Defense Agency said, while Governor David Ige activated the Hawaii National Guard to provide emergency help.

"Please be alert and prepare now to keep your family safe," he said on Twitter to residents living near the volcano.

No injuries or deaths were reported.

Another resident, Ikaika Marzo, told Hawaii News Now that he saw “fountains” of lava as high as 125 feet (38 meters). Others also told the news network they smelled burning brush and heard tree branches snapping.

The Hawaii Fire Department reported extremely high levels of dangerous sulfur dioxide gas detected in the evacuation area, the Civil Defense Agency said.

“Elderly, young, and people with respiratory issues need to comply with the mandatory evacuation order and leave the area,” the agency said in a statement on Friday.

Footage from a drone aired on the Hawaii News Now website showed lava incinerating trees as it crept near structures.

A 492-foot-long (150-meter) fissure erupted with lava for about two hours in Leilani Estates at about 5:30 p.m. local time, the Hawaii Volcano Observatory said on its website.

Lava, which can reach temperatures of about 2,100 degrees Fahrenheit (1,150 Celsius), spread less than about 10 meters (33 feet) from the fissure, the observatory said.

“The opening phases of fissure eruptions are dynamic and uncertain. Additional erupting fissures and new lava outbreaks may occur,” it said.

A plume of red ash rose from the volcano’s Pu’u ‘O’o vent high into the sky over the island, according to photos on social media.

Production at the Puna Geothermal plant was suspended until further notice, the Civil Defense Agency said on Friday, while Hawaii Electric Light said crews were disconnecting power in the areas affected by the active lava flow.

The Kilauea Volcano has been erupting nearly continuously for more than three decades. Lava flows from the volcano have covered 48 square miles (125 square km), according to the U.S.

Geological Survey.

Local officials closed volcano viewing areas while a portion of the Hawaii Volcanoes National Park was also closed. {eo}

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