

# Commending the Hawai'i County Civil Defense Agency on receiving FEMA's outstanding public service award

Senator Daniel K. Akaka Papers

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COMMENDING THE HAWAII COUNTY CIVIL DEFENSE AGENCY ON RECEIVING  
FEMA'S OUTSTANDING PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD  
Statement by Senator Daniel K. Akaka  
In the United States Senate  
March 7, 1991

Mr. President, today, the Honorable Lorraine Inouye, mayor of the County of Hawaii, will accept the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Outstanding Public Service Award in behalf of the Hawaii County Civil Defense Agency. This award is given annually to those individuals or organizations outside of the Federal agency who best help further FEMA's mission. I am proud to say that the Hawaii County Civil Defense Agency was the only local civil defense organization to be selected among this year's twelve award recipients.

The small, but excellent staff of the Big Island's civil defense office, which is responsible for directing and coordinating all disaster and emergency activities on the largest, most geographically diverse island in my state, amply deserves this award. Over the years, in coordination with Federal, state, and local agencies, and in response to every conceivable type of emergency, from earthquakes and fires to tsunami and hurricanes, the county agency has prevented injury to or death for perhaps thousands of Big Island residents, and saved countless homes, farms, businesses, and important natural resources from damage or destruction.

Most recently, the Civil Defense Agency directed and coordinated disaster relief efforts for the ongoing Kilauea

volcano disaster in the Kalapana region of Hawaii. Last August, when I chaired a Senate Governmental Affairs Committee hearing to investigate how well various relief agencies had responded to the emergency in the wake of the President's May 1990 disaster declaration, I discovered that praise for the Civil Defense Agency, and particularly its Administrator, Harry Kim, was universal. While public officials commended Mr. Kim for the effectiveness with which he and his staff of five directed emergency activities, local residents spoke warmly of the long hours Mr. Kim and his employees spent, and continue to spend, in assisting lava victims.

I was also particularly struck by how often these residents spoke of Mr. Kim's attention to the spiritual and psychological needs of the stricken Kalapana community. It was apparent to the Committee that Mr. Kim, who himself has roots in the area, was intensely sensitive to the fact that many of the families that were forced to relocate because of the lava flows had lived in the area for hundreds of years, and thus maintained a special attachment to the land. In deference to their needs, Mr. Kim therefore made it a policy to allow those whose homes were in the path of the lava flows to visit their former residences as often and as long as possible without endangering themselves or relief workers, despite the extra burden this placed on the Agency. He also did his best to shield them from the intrusions of the media and the general public, who were naturally curious about the awesome spectacle presented by the lava flows.

Mr. President, more than anything else, more than the efficiency of the Agency's relief operations, which is studied as a model by civil defense experts from other states and foreign nations, it is this ability to balance the often competing needs of disaster victims against the demands of public safety that truly sets Harry Kim and the Hawaii County Civil Defense Agency apart. For while it is one thing to be efficient, it is quite another to understand the human dimension of tragedy.

If I have only one criticism of Harry Kim and his staff--Bruce Butts, Wendell Hatada, Lanny Nakano, Audrey Kualii, and Dorothy Yanagisawa--it is that they are not in Washington today to receive this award. I infer from their absence that they are too busy to be away from their jobs. This speaks well of them, though it precludes the rest of us from having the proper opportunity to honor them as heroes. For that is what the men and women of the Hawaii County Civil Defense Agency are, Mr. President, heroes. In behalf of the people of Hawaii, I thank them for a job well done and look to them and Mayor Inouye for continued outstanding performance.

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