



The Flood at the John A. Burns School of Medicine

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On the evening of October 30, 2004, 9 inches of rain in a 6-hour period drenched upper Manoa Valley, causing a flash flood. The result was a 4-foot wall of water that slammed into the Biomedical Sciences Building, home of the John A. Burns School of Medicine. The Institute of Biogenesis and the first floor of Biomed and all of its courts sustained major hits. Water and mud flowed over lab counter and benches, into computers, books, and papers, over freezers and incubators and machinery. The auditorium (B-103) and the basement became receptacles for 5 feet of water. Another seriously affected building was Hamilton (graduate) Library. The main transformer and electrical supply cables that powered 35 buildings went out.

Most folks seem to know little of what happened. The assumption was that some stuff got wet and that it has since been cleaned up. For those who occupied these facilities, there was no time for bereavement. Because of likely health hazards such as mold blooms, instructions were compiled to vacate the building in 48 hours, without waiting for major assistance from the system resources. With Dr. Sam Shomaker's leadership (Vice Dean for Academic Affairs and Education), staff, students, faculty, and volunteers (Army National Guard) worked feverishly in the mud and the dark (no electricity) through the first week of November to salvage as much as possible. No one complained. All worked, without breaks and often forgoing meals, to save the most important documents, files, and books.

Of great concern were the emergency needs of critical research and animal care areas. Enough power from emergency generators kept the freezer operational in the upper floors of Biomed Tower. Three thousand pounds of dry ice were distributed to preserve samples and other materials that needed to remain cold and frozen in the affected buildings. Affected library collections were placed in freezer trucks so that they could be preserved.

On the fourth day, a convocation was held in the Newman Center for a chance to share the trauma of the past few days as well as memories of the 33 year-old building that was home to so many staff, students, graduates and faculty. Those that met spoke of those ties, thanked each other; and then went back to work. For all of us in the helping professions, this is what we do to take care of each other: hold hands, thank each other for being there, and get back to the task at hand. On the fifth day, a professional catastrophe team from Texas was retained to undertake detailed clean up and to plan for limited occupancy of personnel and programs above the ground floor.

The task of finding spaces on the campus and elsewhere to relocate offices, classrooms, student records, business files, and educational material and books became a daunting task. With the cooperation of the community, temporary spaces have been acquired. JABSOM's Office of the Dean located to the Gold Bond Building and Kuakini Medical Center; Office of Student Affairs, Native Hawai'ian Center of Excellence and Pathology are at Queen's Medical Center University Tower; Office of Medical Education, Imi Ho'Ola, Department of Native Hawai'ian Health, Office of Information Technology, Department of Complementary and Alternative Medicine are at the Gold Bond Building; the Fiscal Office, the Department of Public Health, and Human Resources are at the Dole Cannery; and Ecology and Health is at Leahi Hospital. The main number to call for information is: 587-8369.

Update. On December 4, the air conditioning system in the tower portion of the Biomed Building was turned on to clean the air conditioning vents. On December 5, the professional clean up crew went through the entire tower; floor by floor, to clean and disinfect all exposed surfaces. On December 6, the chiller was turned on to restore air conditioning to the tower. On December 7, these restoration steps provided work conditions in the Biomed Tower, from the second to the seventh, for a safe environment for faculty, staff and students. It is not known, at this writing, when generator power can be provided via electrical circuits to the courtyards of the building.

For those who have relocated to all parts of Honolulu, the comment heard is, "If only the Act of God of giving us all that rain on the night of October 30, 2004, could have come in March, 2005, it would lend such a natural transition to the new JABSOM campus at Kaka'ako." If only...

This catastrophic flood has fueled our anticipation of moving to Kaka'ako in April, 2005, to two new buildings totaling 300,000 square feet of floor space constructed on 9.5 acres of prime land at a cost of \$150 million. We are more convinced than ever, that JABSOM's community of faculty, staff and students are no match in working as a team. Their stamina, motivation, and resilience are beyond reproach. They will not be fazed with any challenge, even another storm like the one on October 30, 2004. They have proven themselves. The community can depend on all of us to fulfill our mission of becoming the best medical school in the world, with an Asia/Pacific focus.