Preparing Youth for Disasters

The Situation
The state of Hawai‘i is susceptible to many significant hazards, such as tsunami, hurricanes, windstorms, flash flooding, mud slides, wildfires, and earthquakes.

Community-based disaster preparedness, especially for youths in middle and high school, is inadequate to meet the need. In addition, the 2023 wildfire disasters on Maui have left the immediate community with a sense of loss of control, decision-making ability, and uncertainty about the future. These impacts have focused renewed attention on disaster preparedness throughout the state.

Extension’s Response
Since 2018, the Disaster Preparedness program has been delivered on Maui to train youths in fire safety and suppression, light search-and-rescue, CPR, disaster psychology, and other topics to complete the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA)’s Teen Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program. Youths also work with community members to develop emergency kits and plans as community service. During the final disaster simulation, youths demonstrate knowledge and skills in several areas, including first aid, triage, communications, and damage assessment.

In the wake of the wildfires on Maui, the program was adapted for a 3-day, state-wide training, in partnership with other organizations, for 110 high school students from across the state. The program also incorporated discussion of how participants can contribute to the long-term disaster recovery process on Maui and future disaster planning on their islands.

Community Benefit
• A total of 501 teen youth have been trained.
• Students averaged a 73% increase in knowledge about disaster preparedness and response from pre-test to post-test with 32% of youth receiving a score of 80% or higher.
• All youth participants competently demonstrated skills in fire suppression, damage assessment, first aid, and triage in simulation exercises.
• Youth who completed the community service project worked with six families to develop emergency plans and kits, leading to 1,617 families and an average of 4,851 informed community members reached.
• Youth responded with a nearly 3% higher confidence after the program on questions related to their ability to help their community.

Nancy Ooki
Associate Maui County 4-H Agent
Department of Family and Consumer Sciences
Kahului Extension Office
ooki@hawaii.edu, (808) 244-3242 x225

This information has been reviewed by CTAHR faculty
• A savings of $420,840 in community disaster preparedness (based on the $28 average hourly rate for volunteers and 15,030 total training hours) was generated.
• The community gained teams able to provide immediate assistance to others and enhance community resilience and self-sufficiency.

High school students from the Big Island (Ka'ū), O'ahu (Waianae), Maui (Hana, Lahaina, Kihei, and Pukalani), Lāna'i, Moloka'i, Kaua'i, and Ni'ihau gathered at Baldwin H.S. in Wailuku, Maui, for disaster response training – Hawai'i's first-ever statewide event tailored specifically for teens.