The Last Mile

Hawai‘i County Civil Defense

Harry Kim, Mayor
The clocks stopped—and so did nearly everything else in Hilo—when the wave struck shortly after 1 a.m., Monday, May 23, 1960.
Sturdy parking meters weren't sturdy enough.
Hilo before 1960 tsunami
Hilo after 1960 tsunami
Hilo after 1960 tsunami
Tsunami impact area today
Major Lessons Learned During the Development of Early Warning Systems
Tsunami of 1960

Tidal Wave Disaster Points Up Flaws In Warning System

Many Confused By New System

False Alarms Tend To Result

Rescue Efforts Uncoordinated

TIME TO INSIST ON ANSWERS TO A MAJOR ISLAND PROBLEM

This is the time for Federal officials to be made available for research into methods of warning systems, and to develop a disaster plan for Hawaii. Hawaii is inhabited by many people and needs to be protected. The government is responsible for ensuring the safety of its citizens.

Rescue efforts are uncoordinated and confusing, causing many people to become confused and thought to be in danger.

The time is now to insist on answers to a major island problem.
Tidal Wave Disaster Points Up Flaws In Warning System

Many Confused By New System

STORY BEHIND THE STORY

The careful research and reporting of Ed Espelande and Ed Edwards in today's stories about the disaster warning system are outlined in an editorial on page 4.

Rescue Efforts Uncoordinated

Many of them died quickly and miserably.
Others met death in agony beneath the tangled wreckage of their homes.

Some of the injured were trapped until dawn, their pain increasing, their cries unanswered, their hopes fading.
Friends and relatives scouring the wreckage, a few were rescued before the horrors began.

But there was no organized concerted rescue drive in the little town from the time the wave hit until dawn.

There is this entry on the log of Civil Defense headquarters in Hilo dated at 05:30 a.m., little over two hours after the wave hit.

"Order issued that no one is to enter the area until daylight." A policeman on duty outside devastated Waiakapu town told a reporter at about 4 a.m.

"There is a family trapped in their home but they won't get out until daylight because we are afraid another wave may hit and we don't have proper lights."

Other police officers added more applying.

Rescue efforts in the downtown area began soon after the wave hit and many officers worked in the Kilauea area.

But the workers were too few, too disorganized and too poorly equipped to reach all the victims in time.

A ham radio amateur, who had been used, probably would have told officials that wave action in the bay after the big wave was normal turbulence and another wave would not hit.

And a few portable searchlights would have worked wonders had they been available.

An indication of the number of people trapped and the effectiveness of one good light and three men came from Kailua.

John Asahina, deputy superintendent of Hilo National Park, and Park Ranger Bob Hara, ordered their men to the field.

The Park officials were equipped with a nine-volt portable searchlight which Asahina carried.

With an unidentified police officer, they entered the Kilauea area at 8 a.m.

When they left two hours later they had freed six victims from the wreckage.

There apparently was no store of serviceable lights available and no advance plan to roll on planes half an hour away for tractors equipped for night harvest work which would have been invaluable in probing the wreckage.

A list of advance planning raised 1167's death toll.

Tsunami Observers—This picture was taken at the Hukilau Restaurant by Tribune-Herald photographer Larry Honda on the first wave of the Mar 23 tsunami swept inland.

The rescued figure in the foreground apparently is attempting to grab fish which were swept in by the wave. Supervisor James Yamasaki, with camera, looks on.
TIME TO INSIST ON ANSWERS TO A MAJOR ISLAND PROBLEM

From both sides of the political fence come demands that the warning system mess be cleaned up. And from Peter Pakele, hard-working Civil Defense director here, comes word that his plan to improve the local warning system has been submitted to the Board of Supervisors.

Nearly everybody agrees that the system is much less than the community has a right to expect.

The Big Island in particular—because it has suffered so deeply—applauds the quick action of its own Senate President William H. Hill and of Elmer F. Cravalho, speaker of the House.

Both have said they will consider special investigation of the problem.

There actually is more than one problem.

The Tribune-Herald was the first to point out the need for an international warning system. Last month’s devastating wave originated in Chile, but we knew virtually nothing about it except that it was on the way.

This is the time for Federal funds to be made available for research into habits of seismic waves with a view to developing a device for tracking them. Studies of our apparent susceptibility to waves also are indicated. This is more than a local problem, and immediate Federal action seems proper.

The local warning and disaster relief program poses another problem, one that is related to waves but one that could be related to enemy attack.

The State’s investigation should be concerned with seeking remedies, and must not be destroyed by political maneuvers.

There must be a clearly-understood plan of action and authority right here on the Big Island in the event of another disaster. Everyone must know who gives the orders and how the local mechanism operates if disaster should result in a breakdown of communications between the Big Island and Oahu.

Fast action is imperative.
Disaster may strike at any time. We’re not ready for it now.
The Big Wave—May 23, 1960

Nearly everyone on the Big Island of Hawaii was listening to radio reports being broadcast from Honolulu, some 200 miles away.

Announcers said that an earthquake in far-off Chile had generated a seismic sea wave. The wave might be dangerous to Hawaii, because it might not wear itself out even after travelling 6,700 miles at high speed.

Many people left their homes in low areas. Others were packed and ready to flee, waiting for some kind of “final warning.”

In Hilo, principal city on the Big Island, many waited for word of wave action at South Point some 70 miles closer to Chile.

Everyone waited through a long Sunday night. Then, a little after midnight, a Hilo Tribune-Herald reporter phoned his office.

There was water on Banyan Drive in the Waiakea Peninsula area of Hilo, he said. The time was about 12:20 a.m.

There were two more waves, but no flash of danger from South Point.

The waves were a sound as strange as an express train approaching. It was no train, because the Big Island’s railroads were wiped out in the 1960 tidal wave.

I was sitting in my office at the Tribune-Herald, two blocks from Kamehameha Avenue. On the other side of Kamehameha Avenue is Hoolehua Park, beyond that a bayfront drive and then the water of Hilo Bay.

When I heard the roar I raced out of the building and onto Mamo Street, where I started toward the bay.

The street was almost deserted. Policemen prevented the curios from entering the area, but the press was admitted. I was headed toward the intersection of Mamo and Keawe Streets, one block closer to the bay than the Tribune-Herald building.

Just a few minutes earlier I had stood there talking with the policemen and wondering why more people weren’t evacuating the area.

But before I could get more than a few yards down the slope of Mamo Street I saw it.

The streetlights were still on. Suddenly they were overwhelmed by the Big Wave, the fourth one of the early-morning hour. It was as high as a two-story building.

There wasn’t long to look at it.

With bizarre flashes like the lightning of a dozen low-hanging thunderstorms all piercing the sky at once, the street lights and all the other lights in the waterfront district went out.

The roar of the massive wall of water blended with the crashing of dozens of stores and apartments and theatres and restaurants—and with the screams of dozens of persons for whom the final noisy warning came in the same moment with death.

I ran up the hill of Mamo Street, more frightened than I can now even recall.

My wife told me later that she had been watching the downtown area from our home in the hills beyond the city. She said it looked as though the whole town had exploded. The biggest burst came from the Hilo...
“I thought my home was safe because the 1946 tsunami did not come here. When I saw a lot of people by the pier, I thought I must be safe or they would not stay there.”

- Mrs. Ito, tsunami survivor
What tsunami? Alert system told little

BY BRUCE HUNSON
News Editor

I felt decidedly unhappy with myself as we stopped at the gas station of the A-1 Shell station near Waimea. The newspaper in my pocket had called it a tsunami. The headline read: "Tsunami expected on Hawaii." My prescription for warding off such articles was reading back issues of the newspaper, but even there I found nothing about the consequences of a tsunami. I thought, "My gosh, you've been reading too many disaster stories."

I gathered the contents of the bag on the seat and started for the store. "Who would be so stupid to trust a newspaper for a storm warning?"

I was particularly alarmed at the circular sail of a merry Go-Go, etc., etc., and so forth. My view of the world is that of a man who has seen nothing but a newspaper. It is a dangerous thing to read a newspaper. The reader is left with the impression that the world is full of dumb people who have no brains at all. It is a dangerous thing to read a newspaper.

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California Tsunami Warning of 2005

“In Santa Monica, officials thought it was ‘just informational, only a bulletin,’ said Police Sgt. Jeff Wiles. Assuming that they would receive an update if the situation became more serious, city officials decided not to open their emergency operations center.”

Los Angeles Times

June 16, 2005
“In Huntington Beach, the police watch commander on duty had trouble interpreting the bulletins and wasn’t sure whether a tsunami warning was actually in effect. ‘They were confusing to read through,’ said Lt. Craig Junginger.”

Los Angeles Times

June 16, 2005
“Lon Waxstein, commander in the Half Moon Bay Police Department, said he didn’t think there was a reason for panic. ‘People need to get a grip,’ he said.”

Los Angeles Times

June 15, 2005
“Larry Collins, the Los Angeles County Fire Department captain on the county’s tsunami task force, said, ‘We don’t have a consistent plan statewide or even county-wide. Right now, some places evacuate and others don’t. Each city makes their own rules, and there’s no governing body that says, ‘You will operate consistently like this,’ he added.’

Los Angeles Times

June 15, 2005
“In Crescent City, there were several reported car accidents as people jammed the roads, trying to make their way out of town, said resident Calvin Maready. Others decided to go down to the beach, to wait for the waves. ‘I don’t know what was going through their heads,’ he said.”

Associated Press

June 16, 2005
Hawai‘i County System Today
System and Plan Development

Central Point
Hawai‘i County Civil Defense

Hazard Identification
Risk Identification

Agency
Role Identification
S.O.P Development

Training
Public Education

Mitigation Strategies

County of Hawai‘i
Integrated Emergency Operations Plan

All department and agencies are responsible for developing and maintaining supporting disaster response plans in consonance with this Basic Plan.
Command Center

Interprets, Translates, Clarifies

Rumors
Official Warning Point
Pseudo-scientists
Media
Folklore & myths

Public
Media
Responders
EARTHQUAKE / TSUNAMI INFORMATION

A. EARTHQUAKE DATA
1. DATE
2. TIME
3. LOCATION
   LATITUDE
   LONGITUDE
4. MAGNITUDE

B. TSUNAMI DATA
1. STATUS  **TSUNAMI WARNING**
2. E.T.A. DATE
3. E.T.A. TIME
Presented by Harry Kim, Mayor, Hawai‘i County Civil Defense in First TARNS Workshop

Developed by NDWC after First TARNS
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Highways/Roadways</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Facilities/Services</th>
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*Inform Police Dispatch & Fire Control*
1. **DISASTER CLASSIFICATION:**
   - Nature Of Disaster: **TSUNAMI**
   - Location: **HAWAII ISLAND**

2. **ESTIMATED CASUALTIES AND DISPLACED PERSONS:**
   - Dead
   - Missing
   - Injured
   - Homeless
   - Evacuated
   - Sheltered

3. **ESTIMATED PRIVATE PROPERTY DAMAGE:**
   - Minor
   - Major
   - Destroyed
   - Total Cost
   - Residence
   - Business
   - Agriculture
   - Utilities
   - Other
   - Totals

4. **ESTIMATED PUBLIC PROPERTY DAMAGE:**
   - Minor
   - Major
   - Destroyed
   - Total Cost
   - Buildings
   - Schools
   - Roads
   - Bridges
   - Water / Sewer
   - Other
   - Totals

5. **ESTIMATED GRAND TOTAL PRIVATE & PUBLIC PROPERTY DAMAGES:**
Zoning
Educational programs
Educational programs
Educational programs
Mahalo