

Kilauea's new vent spewing loads of lava, fumes

March 9 2011, By JAYMES SONG , Associated Press

The latest eruption at Kilauea volcano in Hawaii has a new working name.

Volcanologists on Tuesday said they are calling it the Kamoamoa Fissure Eruption after the area it is located at Kilauea, one of the world's most active volcanoes.

Kamoamoa, which cracked open Saturday, is continuing to spew out loads of lava and gases. Meanwhile, visitors flock to Hawaii Volcanoes National Park hoping to catch a glimpse of the 2,000-degree glowing, red-orange lava that is shooting 65 feet high. But visitors are being kept far away from the isolated, remote east zone rift where the eruption is taking place.

The Hawaiian Volcanoes Observatory said "vigorous spattering" is occurring from at least two locations along the new vent located between Pu'u 'O'o and Napau craters. Low-level lava fountains and spattering are feeding several lava flows advancing to the south within the park.

Kilauea has been in constant eruption since Jan. 3, 1983. The latest eruption is in the same area of the east rift where it started 28 years ago.

Park ranger Mardie Lane said 2.5 million cubic meters of lava is gushing out of Kamoamoa daily, about five times the amount that was previously coming of the east rift zone.

That means the new eruption could fill roughly 1,000 Olympic-sized swimming pools of lava, each day. So far, the lava has blanketed about 120 acres.

"So we're looking at a lot of fume and a lot of flow relative to where we were a week ago," Lane said.

About 10,000 tons of sulfur dioxide is being emitted daily from the east rift zone eruptions, far higher than usual levels.

For several years, the average [gas emissions](#) in the region averaged about 1,700 tons daily. However, it has decreased in the past year and dropped to 300 to 400 tons daily in the past few months, including on Friday before the latest eruption.

No major problems have been reported because of the emissions, since the southerly trade winds are blowing the gases out to sea.

"We're OK for now. I think we would have a concern if there was a wind shift," Lane said.

If the trades stop or if the wind blows the opposite direction, other communities or islands such as Oahu, could experience more volcanic smog, or so-called "vog," that could be problematic with people with pre-existing respiratory conditions. The long-term health effects of vog are unknown.

According to the state Health Department, vog becomes thicker or lighter depending upon the amount of emissions from Kilauea, the direction and amount of wind and other weather conditions.

Hawaii County Civil Defense has issued no warnings and was closely monitoring the volcanic activity.

"We found over years you don't make any assumptions because you never know," agency administrator Quince Mento. "Right now, we're not seeing anything significant downwind of the event. This is fairly near Pu'u crater, which we've been living with for the last 26, 27 years. Given that, we're not expecting too much of a change. We'll see what happens over the next couple of weeks."

This is a different tone for the agency than in 2008 following the eruption at Halemaumau [crater](#) at the summit.

"We tried to predict and we ended up scaring everybody and running evacuations that weren't really necessary. I prefer not to do those type of things," Mento said.

Because of the volcanic activity, the National Park Service has closed the Chain of Craters Road and all east rift and coastal trails, along with Kulanaokuaiki Campground, until further notice. However, the park's most popular overlooks and summit trails remain open.

While visitors are being kept away from the [lava](#), rangers are sharing with them the latest information and videos of Kamoamoa at the Kilauea Visitor Center and Jaggar Museum.

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