

Erupting Hawaii volcano spurs warning for people to prepare

November 28 2022, by Caleb Jones



This image provided by the USGS Hawaiian Volcano Observatory shows a view from a research camera on the north rim of the summit caldera of the Mauna Loa volcano, Monday, Nov. 28, 2022. The U.S. Geological Survey says the eruption began late Sunday night in the summit caldera of the volcano on the Big Island. Early Monday it said lava flows were contained within the summit area and weren't threatening nearby communities. Credit: USGS Hawaiian Volcano Observatory via AP

Waves of orange, glowing lava and smoky ash belched and sputtered Monday from the world's largest active volcano in its first eruption in 38 years, and officials told people living on Hawaii's Big Island to be ready in the event of a worst-case scenario.

The eruption of Mauna Loa wasn't immediately endangering towns, but the U.S. Geological Survey warned the roughly 200,000 people on the Big Island that an eruption "can be very dynamic, and the location and advance of lava flows can change rapidly."

Officials told residents to be ready to evacuate if lava flows start heading toward populated areas.

The eruption began late Sunday night following a series of fairly large earthquakes, said Ken Hon, scientist-in-charge at the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory.

The areas where lava was emerging—the volcano's summit crater and vents along the volcano's northeast flank—are both far from homes and communities.

Officials urged the public to stay away from them, given the dangers posed by lava, which is shooting 100 to 200 feet (30 to 60 meters) into the air out of three separate fissures roughly estimated to be 1 to 2 miles (1.6 to 3.2 kilometers) long.

Volcanic gases wafting out of the vents, primarily sulfur dioxide, are also harmful.

Air quality on the Big Island more generally is good right now but officials are monitoring it carefully, said Dr. Libby Char, the director of the state Department of Health.



Lava pours out of the summit crater of Mauna Loa about 6:35 a.m. Monday, Nov. 28, 2022, as seen from Gilbert Kahele Recreation Area on Maunakea, Hawaii. Mauna Loa, the world's largest active volcano, began spewing ash and debris from its summit, prompting civil defense officials to warn residents on Monday to prepare in case the eruption causes lava to flow toward communities. Credit: Chelsea Jensen/West Hawaii Today via AP

Hon said air quality could deteriorate while the eruption lasts, which scientists expect will be about one or two weeks if the volcano follows historical patterns.

Lifelong Big Island resident Bobby Camara, who lives in Volcano Village, said everyone across the island should keep track of the eruption. He said he's seen three Mauna Loa eruptions in his lifetime and

stressed the need for vigilance.

"I think everybody should be a little bit concerned," he said. "We don't know where the flow is going, we don't know how long it's going to last."

Gunner Mench, who owns an art gallery in Kamuela, said he awoke shortly after midnight and saw an alert on his phone about the eruption.

Mench and his wife, Ellie, ventured out to film the eerie red glow cast over the island, watching as lava spilled down the volcano's side.



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"You could see it spurting up into the air, over the edge of this depression," Mench said.

"Right now it's just entertainment, but the concern is" it could reach populated areas, he said.

Seeing Mauna Loa erupt is a new experience for many residents of the Big Island, where the population has more than doubled from 92,000 in 1980.

More than a third of the island's residents live either in the city of Kailua-Kona to the west of the volcano, or about 23,000 people, and Hilo to the east, with about 45,000. Officials were most worried about several subdivisions some 30 miles (50 kilometers) to the volcano's south that are home to about 5,000 people.

A [time-lapse video](#) of the eruption from overnight showed lava lighting up one area, moving across it like waves on the ocean.

The U.S. Geological Survey said the eruption had migrated to a rift zone on the volcano's northeast flank. Rift zones are where the mountain rock is cracked and relatively weak—making it easier for magma to emerge.



In this aerial photo released by the U.S. Geological Survey, the Mauna Loa volcano is seen erupting from vents on the Northeast Rift Zone on the Big Island of Hawaii, Monday, Nov. 28, 2022. Hawaii's Mauna Loa, the world's largest active volcano, began spewing ash and debris from its summit, prompting civil defense officials to warn residents on Monday to prepare in case the eruption causes lava to flow toward communities. Credit: U.S. Geological Survey via AP

Lava could move toward the county seat of Hilo, but that could take about a week, Hon said at a news conference.

Scientists hope the flow will parallel the 1984 eruption, where the lava was more viscous and slowed down.

Mauna Loa has another rift zone on its southwest flank. Lava could

reach nearby communities in hours or days if the volcano erupts from this area. But Hon said historically Mauna Loa has never erupted from both rift zones simultaneously.

"So we presume at this point that all of the future activity is going to be on the northeast rift zone of Mauna Loa and not on the southeast rift zone," he said. "So those residents in that area do not have to worry about lava flows."

Hawaii County Civil Defense announced it had opened shelters because it had reports of people evacuating from along the coast on their own initiative.



Mauna Loa is seen from the Gilbert Kahele Recreation Area off Saddle Road on the Big Island of Hawaii on Oct. 27, 2022. The ground is shaking and swelling at

Mauna Loa, the largest active volcano in the world, indicating that it could erupt. Scientists say they don't expect that to happen right away but officials on the Big Island are telling residents to be prepared in case it does erupt soon. Credit: AP Photo/Megan Moseley

The USGS warned residents who could be threatened by the lava flows to review their eruption preparations. Scientists had been on alert because of a recent spike in earthquakes at the summit of the volcano, which last erupted in 1984.

Portions of the Big Island were under an ashfall advisory issued by the National Weather Service in Honolulu. It said up to a quarter-inch (0.6 centimeters) of ash could accumulate in some areas.

"Volcanic gas and possibly fine ash and Pele's hair may be carried downwind," Gov. David Ige said, referring to glass fibers that form when hot lava erupts from a fissure and rapidly cools in the air. The wind stretches the fibers into long strands that look like hair. "So certainly we would ask those with respiratory sensitivities to take precautions to minimize exposure."

Mauna Loa is one of five volcanoes that together make up the Big Island of Hawaii, the southernmost island in the Hawaiian archipelago.



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Mauna Loa, rising 13,679 feet (4,169 meters) above sea level, is the much larger neighbor of Kilauea, which erupted in a residential neighborhood and destroyed 700 homes in 2018. Some of Mauna Loa's slopes are much steeper than Kilauea's, so lava can flow much faster when it erupts.

During a 1950 eruption, the mountain's lava traveled 15 miles (24 kilometers) to the ocean in under three hours.

Mauna Loa's volume is estimated at least 18,000 square miles (75,000 square kilometers), making it the world's largest volcano when measured from the ocean floor to its summit.

Tourism is Hawaii's economic engine but Big Island Mayor Mitch Roth predicted few problems for those vacationing during the eruption.

"It will be spectacular where it is, but the chances of it really interrupting the visitor industry—very, very slim," he said.



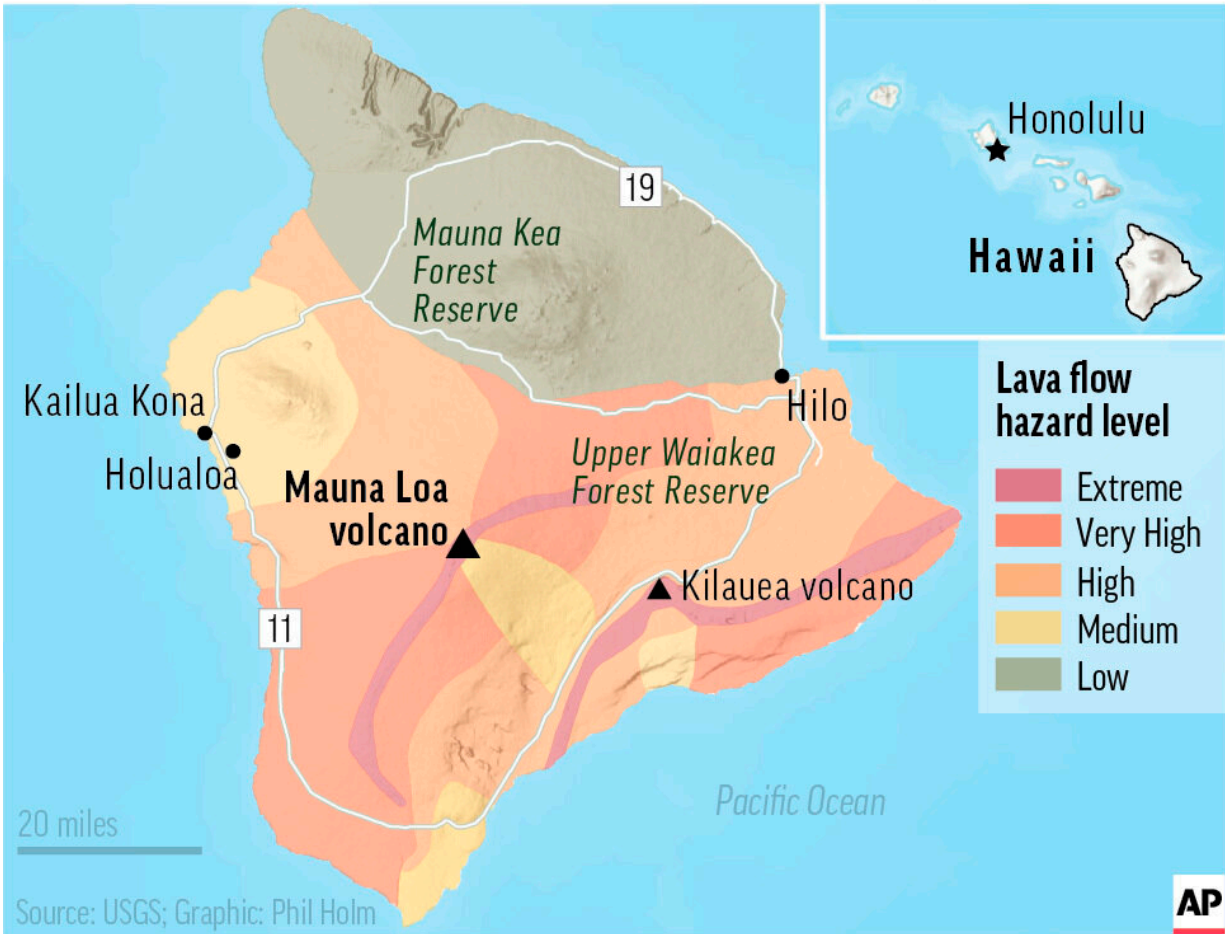
En esta fotografía aérea publicada por el Servicio Geológico de Estados Unidos se muestra al volcán Mauna Loa de Hawai, el lunes 28 de noviembre de 2022.

Credit: Servicio Geológico de Estados Unidos vía AP



In this aerial photo released by the U.S. Geological Survey, the Mauna Loa volcano is seen erupting from vents on the Northeast Rift Zone on the Big Island of Hawaii, Monday, Nov. 28, 2022. Hawaii's Mauna Loa, the world's largest active volcano, began spewing ash and debris from its summit, prompting civil defense officials to warn residents on Monday to prepare in case the eruption causes lava to flow toward communities. Credit: U.S. Geological Survey via AP

Lava flow hazard zones for Hawaii's Big Island



The ground is shaking and swelling at Mauna Loa, the largest active volcano in the world, indicating that it could erupt. Scientists say they don't expect that to happen right away but officials on the Big Island of Hawaii are telling residents to be prepared in case it does erupt soon. This map shows the lava flow hazard level zones for the island.

Tourism officials said no one should have to change Big Island travel plans.

For some, the eruption might cut down on some travel time, even if

there is more volcanic smog caused by higher sulfur-dioxide emissions.

"But the good thing is you don't have to drive from Kona over to Hawaii Volcanoes National Park to see an eruption anymore," Roth said. "You can just look out your window at night and you'll be able to see Mauna Loa erupting."

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Citation: Erupting Hawaii volcano spurs warning for people to prepare (2022, November 28) retrieved 2 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2022-11-hawaii-mauna-loa-erupts-people.html>

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