

Hawaii volcano eruption has some on alert, draws onlookers

November 30 2022, by CALEB JONES and JENNIFER SINCO
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Spectators watch the lava flow down the mountain from the Mauna Loa eruption, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, near Hilo, Hawaii. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia

The first eruption in 38 years of the world's largest active volcano is

attracting onlookers to a national park for "spectacular" views of the event, and it's also dredging up bad memories among some Hawaii residents who have been through harrowing volcanic experiences in the past.

It was just four years ago that Nicole Skilling fled her home near a community where more than 700 residences were destroyed by lava. She relocated to the South Kona area, only to find herself packing her car with food and supplies this week after Mauna Loa erupted late Sunday.

Officials were initially concerned that lava flowing down the side of the volcano would head toward South Kona, but scientists later assured the public that the eruption migrated to a rift zone on Mauna Loa's northeast flank and wasn't threatening any communities.

Still, the uncertainty is somewhat unnerving.

"It just happened last night, so I really haven't had a lot of time to worry about it yet, basically," Skilling said Monday. "And thankfully, right now, it's at the northeast rift zone. But if it breaks on the west side, that's when we're talking about coming into a large populated area. ... That's why I do have a little bit of PTSD."

Even though there were no evacuation orders, some people decided to leave their homes, prompting officials to open shelters in the Kona and Kau areas. Very few if any stayed in them overnight, Hawaii County Mayor Mitch Roth said, and they would be closing Tuesday.



In this satellite image provided by Maxar Technologies, lava flows from the Mauna Loa volcano on the Big Island of Hawaii, Monday, Nov. 28, 2022. Waves of orange, glowing lava and ash blasted and billowed 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. Credit: Satellite image ©2022 Maxar Technologies via AP

Despite that, some in the area were preparing for unpredictable changes.

Kamakani Rivera-Kekololio, who lives in the south Kona community of Hookena, was keeping supplies like food and blankets in his car.

"We're being makaukau for anything," Rivera-Kekololio said, using the Hawaiian word for "ready."

Ken Hon, scientist-in-charge at the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory, said Tuesday that the lava was flowing "not super fast" at less than 1 mph, though the exact speed wasn't yet clear. It was moving downhill about 6 miles (10 kilometers) from Saddle Road, which connects the east and west sides of the island. The flow was likely to slow down about 4 miles (6.4 kilometers) from the road when it hits flatter ground.

It was not clear when or if the lava will reach the road. It could hit flatter ground later Tuesday or Wednesday, according to Hon.



In this image taken from video, Nicole Skilling of Captain Cook, Hawaii stands next to her packed car as she visits Mauna Loa volcano's eruption site in Hilo, Hawaii, Monday, Nov. 28, 2022. Skilling lived near the site of the 2018 Kilauea eruption and moved to the South Kona area, which is another high risk zone for volcanic activity. Credit: AP Photo/Caleb Jones

"We're not even sure it will reach the highway, but that is certainly the next step in progress if it continues on these trends," he said, adding that it's also possible a fissure could open up and drain away some of the supply feeding the flow.

The smell of volcanic gases and sulfur was thick in the air Tuesday along Saddle Road, where people were watching a wide stream of lava creep closer. Clouds cleared to reveal a large plume of gas and ash rising from an open summit vent above the flow.

Gov. David Ige issued an emergency proclamation.

"We're thankful the lava flow is not affecting residential areas at this time, allowing schools and businesses to remain open," he said in a statement. "I'm issuing this Emergency Proclamation now to allow responders to respond quickly or limit access, if necessary, as the eruption continues."



People watch the eruption of Mauna Loa, Monday, Nov. 28, 2022, near Hilo, Hawaii. Mauna Loa, the world's largest active volcano erupted Monday for the first time in 38 years. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia

Hon said lava crossed the Mauna Loa Observatory access road Monday night and cut off power to the facility. It could move toward the county seat of Hilo, he added, but that could take a week or longer.

Meanwhile, scientists are trying to measure the gas emitted from the eruption.

"It's just very early in this eruption right now," Hon said.

The eruption is drawing visitors to Hawaii Volcanoes National Park,

which is open 24 hours a day. "The viewing has been spectacular" especially before sunrise and at night, park spokeswoman Jessica Ferracane said.

Visitors there are currently able to witness two eruptive events: the glow from Kilauea's lava lake and lava from a Mauna Loa fissure.

"This is a rare time where we have two eruptions happening simultaneously," Ferracane said.

People in the northern Hilo neighborhood closest to the Mauna Loa eruption were cautious, but not overly scared Tuesday.



A spectator watches the lava flow down the mountain from the Mauna Loa eruption, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, near Hilo, Hawaii. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia

Lindsay Cloyd, 33, said it makes her a bit nervous, but she feels safe and is also in awe of the forces of nature happening in her backyard.

Originally from Utah and living in Hawaii for only a few years, she has never been part of an eruption.

"I feel so humbled and small," she said, adding that "it's a profound, incredible experience to get to be here while that's happening."

Down the street, Thomas Schneider, 38, an optical engineer at the Gemini Observatory on Mauna Kea, just finished building his new home in the neighborhood.

The threat of lava never came up when he was buying the property, but he'd lived in Hilo for over a decade and knew the risks.

"If you were to look around my property you would see lava rock formations sticking out," he said. "We live on an active volcano, so everywhere is kind of a lava zone."



The Mauna Loa volcano is seen erupting in the background near Waimea, Hawaii, on Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022. Waves of orange, glowing lava and ash blasted and billowed 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. Credit: AP Photo/Caleb Jones



In this long camera exposure, cars drive down Saddle Road as Mauna Loa erupts in the distance, Monday, Nov. 28, 2022, near Hilo, Hawaii. Mauna Loa, the world's largest active volcano erupted Monday for the first time in 38 years. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia

Time for lava to reach populated areas in Hawaii varies

NORTH KONA

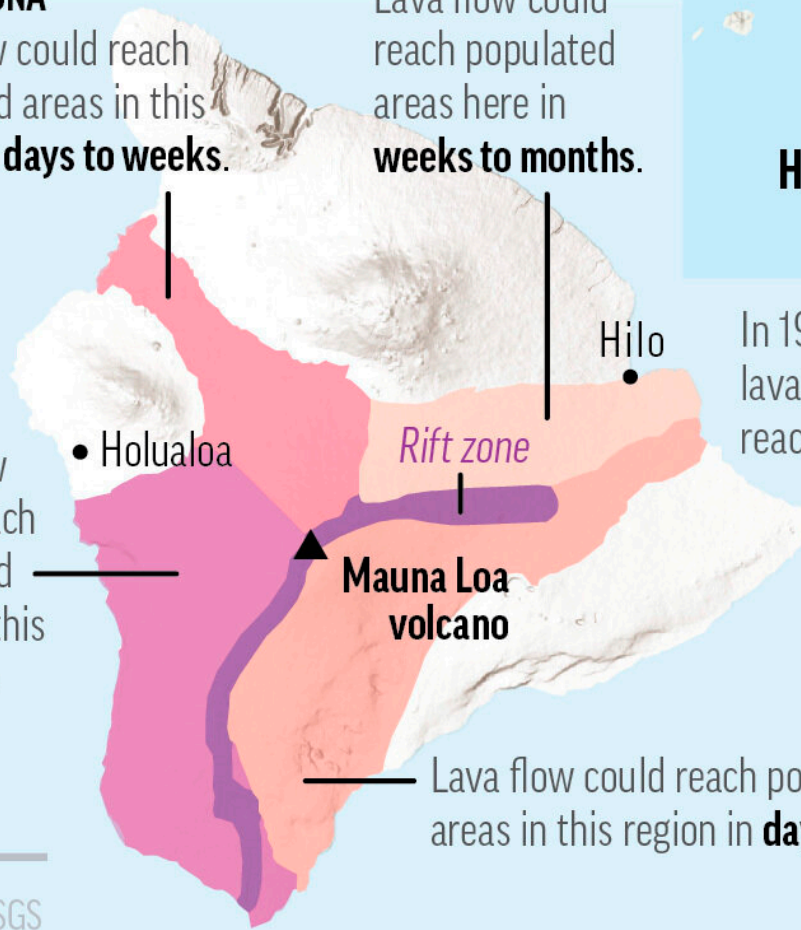
Lava flow could reach populated areas in this region in **days to weeks.**

Lava flow could reach populated areas here in **weeks to months.**



SOUTH KONA

Lava flow could reach populated areas in this region in **hours.**



In 1984, it took lava **280 days** to reach Hilo.

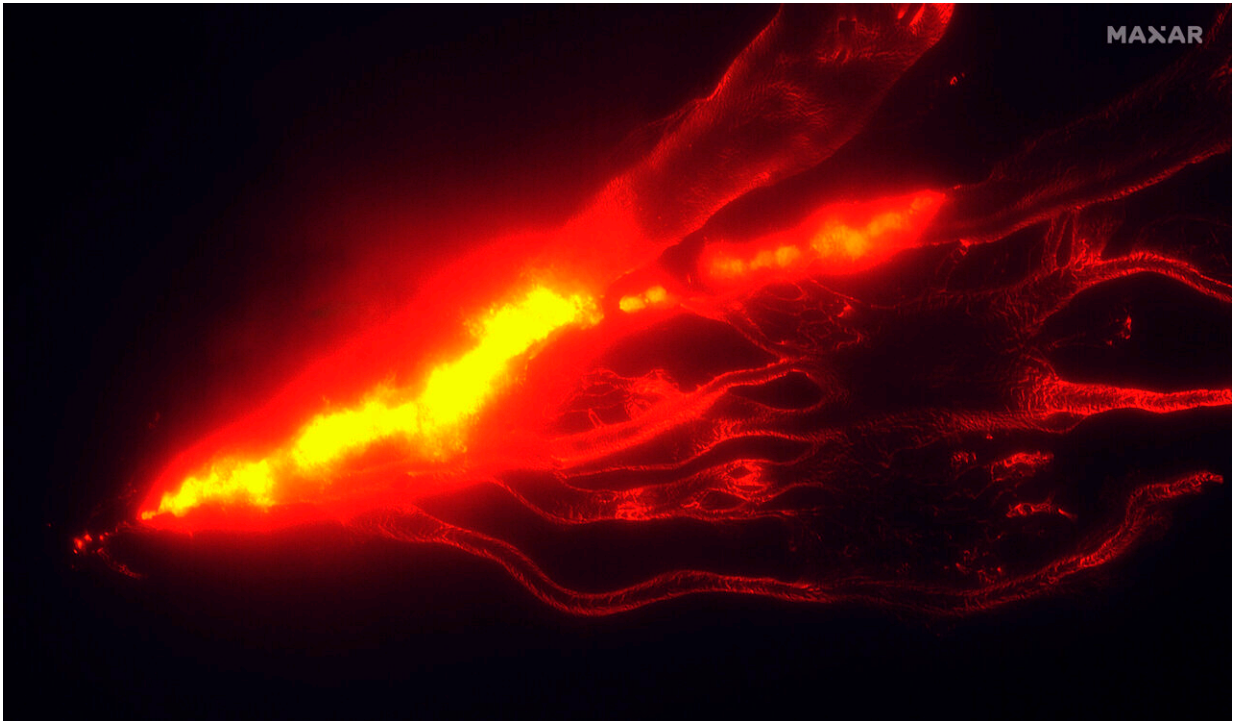
Lava flow could reach populated areas in this region in **days to weeks.**

20 miles

Source: USGS

AP

Hawaii's Mauna Loa volcano has begun erupting. This map shows approximate times lava could reach populated areas across the Big Island



In this nighttime satellite image provided by Maxar Technologies, lava flows from the Mauna Loa volcano on the Big Island of Hawaii, Monday, Nov. 28, 2022. Waves of orange, glowing lava and ash blasted and billowed 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. Credit: Satellite image ©2022 Maxar Technologies via AP



The glow of the Mauna Loa eruption is seen through a grove of palm trees, Monday, Nov. 28, 2022, in Kona, Hawaii. Mauna Loa, the world's largest active volcano erupted Monday for the first time in 38 years. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



Spectators pull over on Saddle Road to watch the eruption on Mauna Loa, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, near Hilo, Hawaii. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



In this long camera exposure, cars drive down Saddle Road as Mauna Loa erupts in the distance, Monday, Nov. 28, 2022, near Hilo, Hawaii. Mauna Loa, the world's largest active volcano erupted Monday for the first time in 38 years. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



An altar is built on an old lava field in front of the erupting Mauna Loa, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, near Hilo, Hawaii. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



The glow of the Mauna Loa eruption is seen from Kona Bay, Monday, Nov. 28, 2022, in Kona, Hawaii. Mauna Loa, the world's largest active volcano erupted Monday for the first time in 38 years. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia

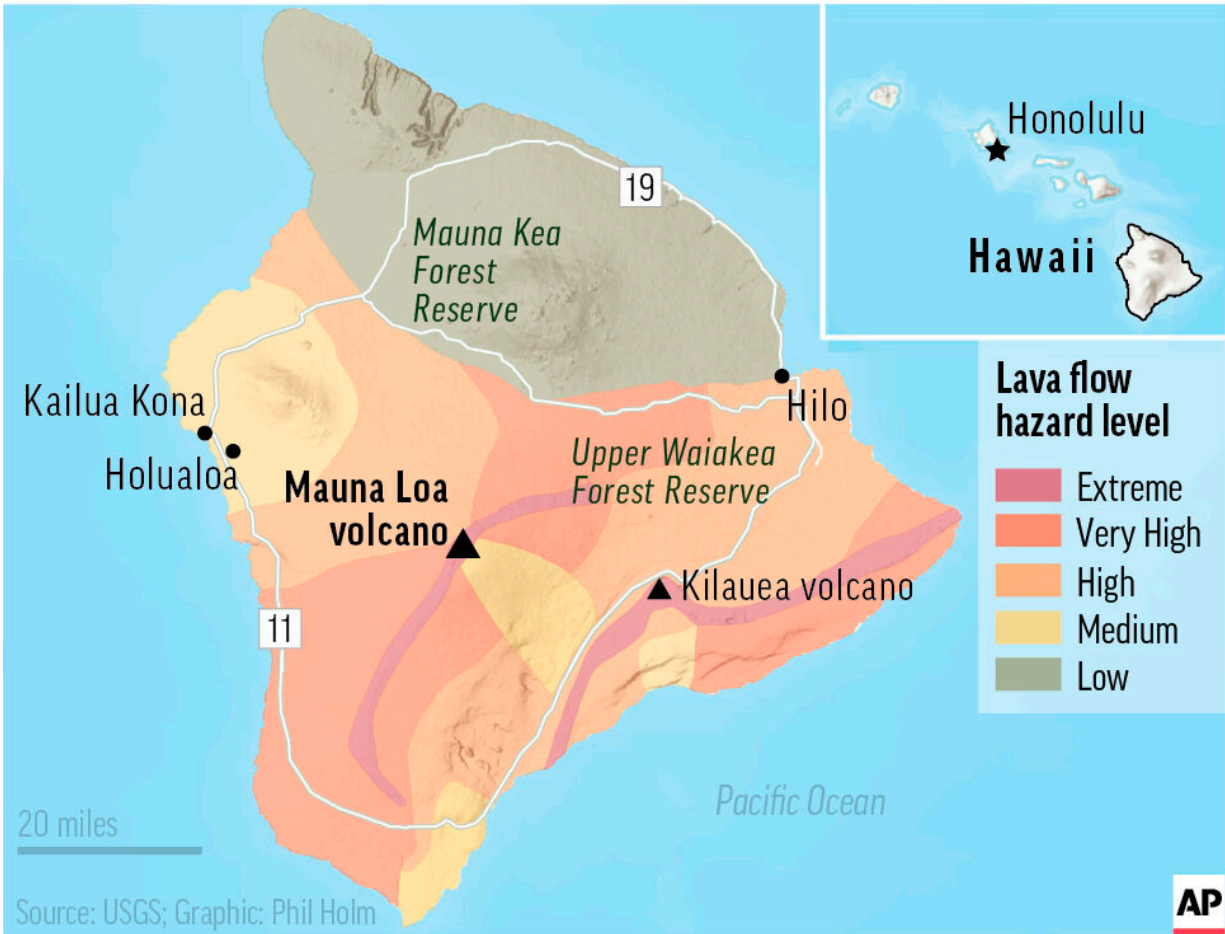


The glow of the Mauna Loa eruption is seen from Kona Bay, Monday, Nov. 28, 2022, in Kona, Hawaii. Mauna Loa, the world's largest active volcano erupted Monday for the first time in 38 years. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



A river of lava flows down from Mauna Loa, Monday, Nov. 28, 2022, near Hilo, Hawaii. Mauna Loa, the world's largest active volcano erupted Monday for the first time in 38 years. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia

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.



A river of lava flows down from Mauna Loa, Monday, Nov. 28, 2022, near Hilo, Hawaii. Mauna Loa, the world's largest active volcano erupted Monday for the first time in 38 years. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



A spectator watches the lava flow down the mountain from the Mauna Loa eruption, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, near Hilo, Hawaii. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



A Native Hawaiian offering is left on an old lava field in front of the erupting Mauna Loa, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, near Hilo, Hawaii. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



Cars are parked near an ancient lava field as a lava flow colors the sky above Mauna Loa, Monday, Nov. 28, 2022, near Hilo, Hawaii. Mauna Loa, the world's largest active volcano erupted Monday for the first time in 38 years. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



Lindsay Cloyd and her dog, Lily, stand inside their home, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, in Hilo, Hawaii. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



Lindsay Cloyd and her dog, Lily, stand inside their home, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, in Hilo, Hawaii. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



Lindsay Cloyd stands outside her home, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, in Hilo, Hawaii. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



A neighborhood in north Hilo is seen, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, in Hilo, Hawaii. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



The front of the home where Lindsay Cloyd and her dog, Lily, live, is seen Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, in Hilo, Hawaii. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



Tom Schneider over looks his neighborhood from his balcony, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, in Hilo, Hawaii. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



Tom Schneider over looks his neighborhood from his balcony, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, in Hilo, Hawaii. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



Tom Schneider talks about the current eruption on Mauna Loa and whether it will affect his home, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, in Hilo, Hawaii. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



Car travel down Saddle Road near the Mauna Loa eruption, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, near Hilo, Hawaii. Despite local authorities enforcing a no parking zone in the area near the eruption site, many spectators are flooding the area and illegally parking on the side of the highway. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



Car travel down Saddle Road near the Mauna Loa eruption, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, near Hilo, Hawaii. Despite local authorities enforcing a no parking zone in the area near the eruption site, many spectators are flooding the area and illegally parking on the side of the highway. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



As the Mauna Loa eruption takes place in the background, a car travels down Saddle Road, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, near Hilo, Hawaii. Despite local authorities enforcing a no parking zone in the area near the eruption site, many spectators are flooding the area and illegally parking on the side of the highway. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



Spectators take photos as they watch the lava flow down the mountain from the Mauna Loa eruption, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, near Hilo, Hawaii. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



Spectators watch the lava flow down the mountain from the Mauna Loa eruption, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, near Hilo, Hawaii. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



Spectators watch the lava flow down the mountain from the Mauna Loa eruption, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, near Hilo, Hawaii. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia



A spectator watches the lava flow down the mountain from the Mauna Loa eruption, Tuesday, Nov. 29, 2022, near Hilo, Hawaii. Credit: AP Photo/Marco Garcia

Mauna Loa's last eruption came close to his neighborhood but stopped short.

He said he's not afraid.

"I've been waiting since I moved here to see Mauna Loa go off, it's supposed to be spectacular," he said. "It's kind of exciting that it's finally erupting."

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