

The Hawaii Drowning and Aquatic Injury Prevention Advisory Committee is coordinated by the Hawaii Department of Health Emergency Medical Services and Injury Prevention Systems Branch. It was established to reduce the incidence of drowning and water related spinal cord injuries in Hawaii through networking, education, advocacy, research, and resource development. Considering the increasing trend of drowning and other incidents at Black Rock in Ka'anapali, Maui, the Advisory has compiled the following letter for your reference in decision making regarding this public health issue.

The area of Pu'u Keka'a, also referred to as "Black Rock", fronting the Sheraton Resort in Kaanapali, Maui has seen an increasing trend of drowning and injuries since 2013. Per the Hawaii Department of Health, from 2008 through 2017 there were 21 fatal drownings at the area, the second highest number of such drownings in the state, behind Hanauma Bay, which saw 22 fatal drownings during the same period. About 1 million people visit Hanauma Bay annually, likely at least twice the number of people who visit the area of Pu'u Keka'a. Without an accurate count of beach attendance at Pu'u Keka'a, the rate of drowning cannot be calculated, but with roughly equal numbers of drowning for the 10-year period, it is surely much higher than the rate at Hanauma Bay. All but one of the Pu'u Keka'a drowning decedents were visitors; both Maui and Kauai have the distinction of roughly 3 out of 4 drownings on these islands are tourists.

Spinal cord injuries around Pu'u Keka'a are also showing an increasing trend. From 2009 through 2012 there were 6 SCI in the area around Pu'u Keka'a, placing Ka'anapali at a 7<sup>th</sup> place tie for frequency of SCI. From 2013-2017, however, there were 15 spinal cord injuries in Ka'anapali, including Pu'u Keka'a, making it the location with the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest number of spinal cord injuries in Hawaii. According to the Hawaii Department of Health, the 2<sup>nd</sup> most frequent cause of spinal cord injury in Hawaii is ocean related activities (accounting for 30% of all activities- falls accounts for 37%. Ocean activities are the most common cause of spinal cord injuries for visitors (72%).

In addition to drownings and spinal cord injuries, other ocean trauma incidents are concentrated in the Kaanapali resort area. From 2008-2016, 120 (non- SCI) trauma incidents occurred in the Pu'u Keka'a, accounting for 93% of the total on the west side stretch studied. Immediately south of Ka'anapali at Hanakao'o Beach Park there were four such incidents (3%); just north of Ka'anapali at Kahekili Beach Park there were five (4%).

Former Mayor Alan Arakawa addressed the issue with his 'Ask the Mayor' column in the Maui News on October 27, 2014. In part the article states, "The County is currently meeting with State and Kaanapali Resort officials to work toward establishing a contract similar to the one for Makena Beach, to allow for a State-funded lifeguard tower near Black Rock with a land easement provided by the land owner." In Mayor Arakawa's proposed FY 2019 budget, he allocated \$1.2 M dollars to fund lifeguards at Pu'u Keka'a which was ultimately deleted from the adopted FY 2019 budget after being vetted by the Maui County Council.

This data on increasing drowning, spinal cord injury and other traumatic injury and medical emergencies occurring around Pu'u Keka'a reflects the challenges facing Maui's first responders. The alarming emergency response data involving Pu'u Keka'a has frustrated police, fire, EMS, and ocean safety officers for over a decade now. On December 12, 2017 the Ocean Safety Bureau of the Department of Fire and Public Safety held a community meeting to propose moving the current Hanakao'o lifeguard tower about one mile further north near Pu'u Keka'a. Statistical data mentioned above was given along with the fact that Hanakao'o Beach Park has the lowest recorded attendance of all county beach parks. It is used by residents and seldom by visiting tourists, who have an 8 to 10-fold higher rate of drowning and injuries than residents. Despite the information presented, meeting attendees vehemently opposed relocating the Hanakao'o lifeguard tower to Pu'u Keka'a. Consensus that night was area hotels along with the state should fund lifeguards at Pu'u Keka'a.

A compromise to move Hanakao'o lifeguards to Pu'u Keka'a only on week days was also rejected by the attendees at the meeting. Opposition leaders were informed that officials on the Big Island have been attempting to get funding for lifeguard services on at Kahakai State Park for over 5 years: 2019 makes the 6<sup>th</sup> consecutive year that a bill requesting lifeguards and equipment at Kua Bay has been in legislation. Pu'u Keka'a is not within a State Park, so the legislative process may take even longer. How do we address Pu'u Keka'a during the interim period?

Owners of Sheraton Maui Resort are in strong support of having county lifeguard services fronting their property. Management has offered access, storage, parking, and possibly funding of the roughly \$100K lifeguard tower.

The State of Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources is responsible for near shore waters up to the high-water mark on the beach. Mauka of this point is the property of Sheraton Maui Resort. The State of Hawaii does not employ lifeguards; this falls under the jurisdiction of each county. The nearest County of Maui beach parks are Hanakao'o to the south and Kahekili Beach Park to the north. Sheraton Maui and other resorts pay a percentage of their profits to the State of Hawaii through the Toursim Accommodation Tax (TAT) and General Excise (GE) taxes.

Tourism is the main economic engine in Hawaii, supporting a high percentage of its jobs and providing funding for infrastructure and other needs. However, each ocean drowning, currently averaging 68 fatal and 282 non-fatal annually in Hawaii, has the potential to negate the millions of dollars the Hawaii Toursim Authority- a state entity supported by tax dollars- spends on marketing Hawaii as a world class visitor destination. This problem has existed too long and litigation from future lawsuits will inevitably follow if the status quo remains. It is imperative that lifeguards be funded at Pu'u Keka'a to minimize death and injury. The Hawaii Drowning and Aquatic Injury Prevention Advisory Committee supports and recommends United States Lifesaving Association (USLA) trained lifeguards at or near Pu'u Keka'a to dramatically increase prevention and education efforts along with immediate emergency lifesaving response.