**Prioritizing Safety Awareness and Preparedness in Hawai'i County: A Call to Action**

By Mayor Mitch Roth

The recent events that unfolded in Maui County served as a stark reminder of our vulnerability when nature unleashes its power. A small brush fire quickly transformed into a devastating disaster due to powerful winds and dry conditions. This unsettling reality should resonate with us here on our own island, underscoring the need for proactive safety measures and strong community preparedness.

As we work through the aftermath of these events and begin the process of rebuilding as a state, one message rings clear: we must make safety awareness and preparedness our top priority.

In the face of adversity, let's move beyond placing blame or surrendering to despair and instead take practical steps toward preparedness.

The changing climate is a sobering fact we can't ignore. Recent reports highlight record-breaking temperatures and unprecedented ice loss in polar regions. These shifts in our environment point to an increase in the frequency and intensity of global natural disasters. It's a reminder that nature can be unrelenting and unpredictable.

However, it's not just the changing climate that puts us at risk. There are concrete actions we can take to shield ourselves and our loved ones from disasters.

Here's what we can do:

**Develop a Family Plan**:

Gather your family and work together to create an emergency plan. Designate meeting spots, establish communication methods, and assign roles for each family member. Make sure everyone knows how to reconnect and where to gather if separation occurs during an emergency.

**Prepare an Emergency Kit**:

Compile a well-stocked emergency kit with essentials like non-perishable food, water, medications, first aid supplies, flashlights, batteries, a portable radio, and vital documents like IDs and insurance papers. Store this kit where it's easily accessible.

**Strengthen Your Home**:

Take preventive measures to safeguard your home from potential storm impacts. Trim trees and bushes to prevent damage from loose branches. Reinforce doors and windows and consider installing storm shutters. Keep gutters and drains clear to prevent water buildup.

**Stay Informed**:

Stay updated on weather forecasts and credible alerts. Utilize weather apps, tune into news broadcasts, or listen to the radio for storm developments. Enroll in local authorities' emergency alerts to receive timely information, including evacuation orders and crucial updates.

**Plan for Evacuation**:

Be ready to respond swiftly if evacuation becomes necessary. Plan escape routes, identify nearby emergency shelters, and arrange transportation options beforehand. Pack essential items, including your emergency kit, and adhere to official evacuation instructions.

Our Hawaiʻi County Civil Defense website is a valuable resource for enhancing community preparedness and provides dedicated sections for various hazards, from floods to volcanoes and hurricanes. To receive immediate emergency updates, we strongly recommend downloading the Everbridge app on your personal devices.

As we mend our community and remember those who were affected, let's foster collective awareness that honors their memory. Let's commit to remaining vigilant, well-informed, and ready to tackle challenges head-on.

Our commitment to the welfare and safety of our people remains unwavering. Let us continue to stand united – embracing preparedness, expanding our knowledge, and internalizing the truth that, as a community, our resilience is capable of overcoming even the most formidable trials. By taking these simple steps, we can ensure that our island remains a safe and vibrant place where our keiki can raise their keiki for generations to come.

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