



June/July 2018

Ola Lōkahi

Creating a Healthy Hawaii Together

The mission of the Department of Health is to protect and improve the health and environment for all people in Hawaii. We believe that an optimal state of physical, mental, social and environmental well-being is a right and responsibility of all of Hawaii's people.

DOH Team Rises to the Challenges of the Ongoing Kilauea Eruption

Spectacular geological displays of bright red lava flowing from the Kilauea volcano and oozing from fissures in the ground, and billowing clouds of ash and volcanic smog are capturing the attention of those around the globe.

But there has been an equally as remarkable display by the people involved in the response effort that has been largely unnoticed. Hawaii Department of Health personnel have been working virtually non-stop for a month to respond to the effects of the volcano, rising to the challenge to protect the health and well-being of emergency responders and residents in the Kilauea East Rift Zone.

The Department of Health's Hawaii District Office jumped into the fray without any hesitation when the volcano erupted on May 3. They took immediate action and other DOH personnel and those from other federal and state agencies joined them for a collaborative, multi-agency response.



Bringing Out Our Best

Adversity can bring out the best in people. This is evident in the teamwork among those responding to the ongoing eruption. DOH team members have been integrated in the emergency operations and have been instrumental in instilling a sense of calm to those whose lives have been turned upside.

Residents have had to endure the pain of watching their homes — once their safe, secure refuge — come under siege by unpredictable lava flows. They have been buffeted by a constant barrage of threats to their physical well-being and their idyllic lifestyles. The only thing certain for them is uncertainty. They may cling to their special

(continued on page 2)

Robust Teamwork to Kilauea Eruption

(continued from page 1)

memories, but have had to let go of their dreams for now and focus on getting through each hour, each day.

We should be rightfully proud of the DOH team which has been immersed in the response activities on Hawaii island as well as in Honolulu. Here are some highlights:

- The Hawaii District Health Office (HDHO), led by **Aaron Ueno**, is playing a major role in coordinating and mobilizing inter-departmental resources to address various public health concerns related to the Kilauea volcano eruption, including air quality concerns and mental health issues. The HDHO will continue efforts to guide and advise the affected communities in addressing both the short-term concerns as well as long-term public health impacts. The HDHO staff have made their expertise available 24/7 to assist the county with the response and planning for ongoing and emerging public health and environmental issues.
- With the vog (volcanic smog), sulfur dioxide and hydrogen sulfide gases, air quality monitoring has been a priority for our Clean Air Branch, the Hazard Evaluation and Emergency Response Office, and the State Laboratories Division to ensure responders and the public have access to real-time



DOH team installing air quality monitoring stations.

data to make informed decisions on how to respond to the ongoing volcanic activity.

- The Safe Drinking Water Branch updated precautionary measures to protect residents who have water catchment systems and live downwind of volcanic activity.
- Emergency Medical Services and Injury Prevention System Branch Chief **Dr. Alvin Bronstein** has been deployed to Hawaii Island to consult with the Mayor, the Emergency Operations Center and the Hawaii District Health Office on potentially hazardous gases and ash and to provide public information and education on protection from exposure.

As a physician and toxicologist, Dr. Bronstein's expertise



has been invaluable to the Department's response. Staff have also served in ESF-8 as Departmental liaison between State Civil Defense, federal agencies and the Department of Health to identify and respond to public health and medical needs of the community and to mobilize appropriate resources. Epidemiology staff are also tracking utilization of EMS services to monitor any changes due to the event.

- The Communicable Disease and Public Health Nursing Division has also been involved. Our public health nurses have been an integral member of the Department's Public Health Assessment Team (PHAST). The team has been indispensable in providing front line

(continued on page 3)

Robust Teamwork for Kilauea Eruption

(continued from page 2)

information on shelter needs to the Department's Operation Center. The team provides real-time information on public health, epidemiology, behavioral health and environmental health. Public health nursing has also been integral to getting information out to the community and linking community members to needed resources.

- **Dr. Paul Beighley**, Medical Director of the Adult Mental Health Division on Hawaii island, and his team have been involved in response since the earthquake and tremors were felt the day before the Kilauea eruption on May 3. He has been collaborating with the American Red Cross to ensure mental health counseling is available for those who have been displaced from their homes and are living in shelters, while also taking care of individuals with severe mental illness, who remain the priorities of the Adult Mental Health Division and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division.
- **Rachelle Agrigado, MSW**, Mental Health Supervisor with the Hawaii Department of Health's Hawaii Family Guidance Center, deserves recognition for her steadfast presence at the shelters and in the information center. She has been working overtime, including evenings, to ensure families have access

to the care and attention they need. **Dr. Bill Sheehan** has been backing up the ESF 8 effort at the state Emergency Operations Center.

- The Disease Outbreak Control Division is conducting enhanced community surveillance for respiratory-related issues in medical facilities and shelters. The data provides a general picture of the potential burden on clinics and emergency departments from respiratory complaints. The Division is also conducting active surveillance of emergency responders to track exposure to potentially hazardous gases and ash.
- The Administrative Services Office has been handling travel requests and financial paperwork from all DOH staff involved in the response, as well as coordinating funding and

compiling materials for federal reimbursement. This is a huge additional workload for them as they also close out the fiscal year.

- Under the direction of **Judy Kern**, the Office of Public Health Preparedness (PHP) has been leading ongoing coordination efforts for DOH response under Emergency Support Functions 8 & 10. PHP implemented a partial Department Operations Center (DOC), conducts DOH coordination meetings and briefings, compiles and disseminates situation reports, facilitates multi-sector information sharing, provides communications surge capacity, and works with Hawaii District Health Office to manage Medical

(continued on page 5)



Two Outstanding Employees from Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division Receive National Accolades

Two Department of Health employees in our Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division made Hawaii proud. **Eddie Mersereau, LCSW, CSAC**, Administrator of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division (ADAD), and **Jared Yurow, Psy.D.**, Clinical Psychologist Supervisor in the same division, were recently honored with awards for their outstanding contributions and service to the National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors (NASADAD).

They were both recognized at NASADAD's 2018 annual meeting, which was held in collaboration with the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment and the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention in the Hyatt Regency in Bethesda, Maryland, from May 21 to 24.

"The Hawaii Department of Health is fortunate to have great people on our team who actively participate in professional associations that promote best practices and high standards of care," said **Lynn Fallin**, Deputy Director of Behavioral Health. "The evolving field of substance use disorder prevention, treatment and recovery requires continuous learning. Eddie and Jared have been able to learn from others and share their experiences with their counterparts in other areas of the country. Ultimately, all of their volunteer work benefits the residents we serve in Hawaii."

NASADAD is a private, not-for-profit educational, scientific,



Eddie Mersereau, LCSW, CSAC

and informational organization that serves state drug agency directors and state alcoholism agency directors. NASADAD's basic purpose is to foster and support the development of effective alcohol and other drug abuse prevention and treatment programs throughout every state.

A Well-Deserved Service Award for Eddie Mersereau

Eddie, who has been with ADAD for just two and half years, has quickly shown his expertise and spirit of aloha. He received a NASADAD Service Award for going above and beyond the call of service. He serves on the board of directors and participated in each meeting via conference call, even though that required him to be up at 4 am to participate with his mainland colleagues.



Jared Yurow, Psy.D.

Eddie also enthusiastically participates in association activities. He has served as a member of the public policy committee and actively supports fellow single state agency directors in NASADAD's Region IX, which includes American Samoa, Arizona, California, Guam, Hawaii, Nevada, and the Republic of Palau. Eddie freely shares specific information on Hawaii with NASADAD, which in turn helps the other association members remain informed about trends in Hawaii.

He also served as a panelist at the 2018 conference. Eddie co-presented a session titled, "Hawaii - Rethinking Our System of Care" with **Beth Rutkowski, MPH**, Associate Director of Training & Epidemiologist, UCLA Integrated Substance Abuse Programs and

(continued on page 5)

Robust Teamwork for Kilauea Eruption

(continued from page 3)

- Reserve Corps volunteer efforts.
- The DOH Communications Office has deployed staff to work at the Hawaii Island Joint Information Center to assist in drafting daily messages for the mayor, writing press materials, vetting facts, coordinating news media interviews, posting social media messages, and responding to public questions during 12-hour shifts. The office continues to manage local and national media inquiries related to statewide health issues.

Mahalo to all for contributing your expertise to help those in need on Hawaii Island. We are glad you are part of the DOH team.



Making Hawaii Proud

(continued from page 4)

and Co-Director, Pacific Southwest Addiction Technology Transfer Center (HHS Region 9) with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Jared Yurow Wins Another NASADAD Award in Three Years

This was Jared's second NASADAD award. In 2015, he received the NASADAD Opioid Treatment Network State Representative of the Year Award, and this year, was awarded the NASADAD National Treatment Network State Representative of the Year Award.

Despite being in the middle of the Pacific, his NASADAD colleagues think he is an indispensable member of the team. He is a tireless advocate for people in recovery, devoted to the field and has always volunteered his expertise on numerous

committees, presentations, work groups and conference calls. He continues to educate his mainland counterparts on Hawaii's efforts to collect performance data, promote cultural competence and the importance of sustaining the substance use disorder system.

Joyce Starr, the National Treatment Network (NTN) President, said Jared has "dedicated his time and energy for many years to the NTN and now treatment centers. He always has been the first to volunteer his time, ideas, and has been dedicated to our organization and its success over the years. He is a positive leader and his knowledge and understanding of our field and the challenges we face makes him a great resource. His kindness is what touches my heart the most. To have had the ability to know him all these years makes me a better person."

Congratulations and mahalo to Eddie and Jared!

NASTAD's 2018 Lifetime Achievement Award Goes to Branch Chief Peter Whiticar

Peter Whiticar, Chief of the Hawaii Department of Health's Harm Reduction Services Branch, was recently presented with the 2018 Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD). He received this well-deserved award at NASTAD's annual conference in Washington, D.C., in May.

NASTAD's Lifetime Achievement Award is presented annually to current or former state health department HIV or hepatitis directors or senior staff members who have dedicated their career to working in state government to address the HIV and/or viral hepatitis epidemics.

Dedicated to Preventing Epidemics and Addressing Health Disparities

Peter has dedicated his career to ensuring Hawaii residents have access to high quality infectious disease prevention, care, and treatment services.

He has been Chief of the Harm Reduction Services Branch, previously known as the STD/AIDS Prevention Branch, since 1994. He currently provides statewide leadership and coordination for the prevention, treatment, care and surveillance of HIV, sexually transmitted infections and adult viral hepatitis, and administers the state's medical cannabis patient registry.

Peter has educated colleagues and federal funders about the importance of investing in core public health infrastructure in low incidence states.

He is one of the original founding members of NASTAD, continues to serve on its board of directors, and is an advocate for other states.

A True, Tireless Public Health Advocate

Throughout his career, Peter has remained committed to addressing societal injustices that result in health disparities.

"Whether focused on the needs of gay and bisexual men, persons who inject drugs, transgender individuals, homeless persons, individuals who have experienced incarceration, or non-U.S. born immigrants and refugees, Peter has always sought to create spaces where individuals feel welcomed, valued, and safe," said **Murray Penner**, NASTAD Executive Director. "He brings humanity, humility, ethics, and an unwavering commitment to human rights. Peter is the true embodiment of Hawaii's aloha spirit, and we're honored to present him NASTAD's Lifetime Achievement Award.

Health Director **Bruce Anderson** added: "Peter is a very talented



Murray Penner, Executive Director of the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors (NASTAD), presents Harm Reduction Services Branch Chief Peter Whiticar, with the 2018 Lifetime Achievement Award for his dedication to addressing health disparities and social inequities.

leader who has great compassion for people who are at risk for HIV infection. His insightfulness, tremendous organizational skills, energy and direction are major reasons Hawai'i has a low-incidence for HIV infection."

This Lifetime Achievement Award adds to Peter's previous NASTAD recognition — the Dr. Nicholas A. Rango Award for exemplary national leadership in HIV/AIDS efforts.

NASTAD is a leading non-partisan non-profit association whose mission is to end the intersecting epidemics of HIV, viral hepatitis, and related conditions by strengthening domestic and global governmental public health through advocacy, capacity building, and social justice.