## November 6, 2025

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MEMO TO: WASSP-1(14) File

F R O M: Shane M. Sinenci, Chair Mine M. Maren

Water Authority, Social Services, and Parks Committee

SUBJECT: TRANSMITTAL OF INFORMATIONAL DOCUMENT RELATING TO

MAUI COUNTY WATER SAFETY AND DROWNING PREVENTION

(WASSP-1(14))

The attached informational document pertains to Item 1(14) on the Committee's agenda.

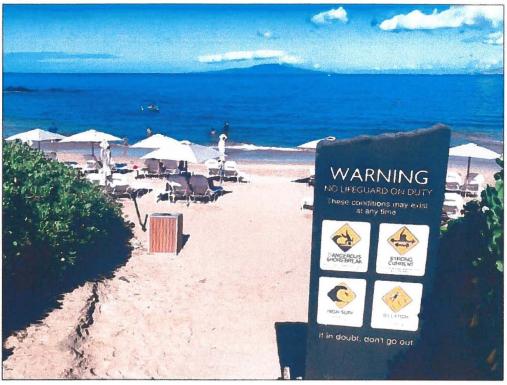
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Attachment

Maui's Newspaper Since 1900

The Week of September 25-October 1, 2025

\$3.00



Warning signs are posted along the pathways in Wailea. But apparently, it isn't enough to deter some visitors from entering the ocean without lifeguard service.

# tops in state drowning rate

By GARY KUBOTA

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Maui led the state with Kauai a close second in having the highest rate of drownings from 2020 through 2024, according to the Hawaii State Department of Health.

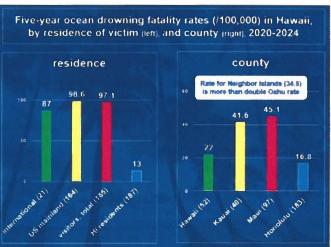
Based on population size, the rate of drownings on Maui was nearly three times as high as Oahu and more than double that of the Big Island.

The total number of drownings from 2020 to 2024 totaled 183 on Oahu, 97 on Maui, 42 on the Big Island and 40 on Kauai.

Maui has less than 20% of Oahu's population, but the Valley Isle is physically larger than Oahu, with miles of coastlines including billion-dollar resorts that do not have lifeguards. Signs are frequently posted near shoreline sidewalks warning beach-goers of the potential dangers, but the ocean can still pose hidden dangers, especially for those unfamiliar with Maui waters.

Cary Kayama, a retired Maui County ocean safety operations manager, said the weather can be nice and easy in the mornings in South Maui, but the wind is often stronger in the afternoon hours, occasionally blowing 15 to 25 mph.

"For us, we can see the wind line ers to return to shore.



Graph courtesy of Hawaii State Department of Health

Maui tops the state as the island with the highest drowning rate per capita, according to the Hawaii State Department of Health.

coming in. The tourists don't know," he said.

When the wind picks up and currents become stronger, lifeguards will tell visitors to put down their umbrel- ed at resorts such as Kaanapali and las and advise swimmers and snorkel-

Maui County water safety lifeguards operate 12 lifeguard towers on Maui with 80 water safety personnel.

When lifeguard services are need-

See DROWNING on Page A8

		10	2,376
		<10	<4%
		<10	<4%
		<10	<4%
		<10	<4%
12	Septicemia	<10	<4%
13	suffocation	<10	<4%
14	Anemias	<10	<4%
15	Cerebrovascular diseases	<10	<4%
16	falls	<10	<4%
17	fire/burn	<10	<4%
18	mvc-pedestrian	<10	<4%
19	Certain other intenstinal infections	<10	<4%
20	mvc-motorcyclist	<10	<4%

Graphic courtesy Hawaii State Department of Health

State officials tracking causes of death among children ages 1 through 15 found drownings were at the top of the list.

## **Drowning leading cause** of death for Hawaii kids

**By GARY KUBOTA** 

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Drowning is the leading cause of death for Hawaii children ages 1 to 15 years old, according to the state Department of Health.

Various causes of death that were tracked from 2020 to 2024 found drownings at the top of the list.

Department officials said congenital anomalies were second, followed by influenza and pneumonia, suicide, malignant neoplasm and heart diseases. According to the department, less than 2% of Hawaii's second-graders or recover from drowning.

As a result of drowning statistics, the state has developed the 2025 Hawaii Water Safety Plan to help to reduce the numbers. For the people to go to beaches with

report, go to bit.lv/4p3o7h3. lifeguards and to pay atten-

partment of Health is also ocean conditions. developing the first-ever ty campaign that includes a partnership with the YMfour locations on Oahu.

Department officials said there are a number of steps that can help to prevent children from drowning, including designating an adult focused and free of distractions to maintain constant visual contact with the children being supervised.

Also, swimming pools have the basic skills to avoid should have barriers with latched gates.

> The American Red Cross also offers a free online class on water safety.

The department advises

The Hawaii State De- tion to warning signs and

A couple of state laws statewide keiki water safe- were passed in 2024 to encourage water safety, including a bill designating CA. The first was started in May 15 as Water Safety Awareness Day.

> Kalani Vierra, president of the Hawaiian Lifeguard Association, said the state Legislature also passed a Duke Kahanamoku license plate measure. Funds from the sales of Duke Kahanamu license plates help to raise money for water safety initiatives, including junior lifeguard programs and learn-to-swim courses for younger people.

> Vierra said people can request the Duke Kahanamoku license plate starting in November.



Illustration courtesy of state Department of Health

The latest available graph shows the locations of drownings on Maui for 10 years ending 2023.

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Wailea, lifeguards are dispatched from county beaches to assist in the rescue.

On May 23, two men from Kazakhstan drowned about 50 vards offshore between Wailea Point and the Four Seasons Resort. Lifeguards about two miles away at the county Kamaole Beach Park III responded to the call as family and other people watched from the shoreline.

"There were no beach rescue devices on the beaches," recalled Marty Forbes, who witnessed the drownings.

Given that beaches are public, Naomi Cooper, the deputy director of the Maui Hotel & Lodging Association, explained that beach and ocean safety falls within the county's and state's jurisdiction.

However, Cooper said the hotels have had discussions with the county

'We have been working since 2019 to secure permissions and go through the permitting process ... a process that we hope to bear fruit the next year - County Dept. of Fire and Public Safety spokesperson.

on how they can partner and support water safety staffing.

Chris Stankis

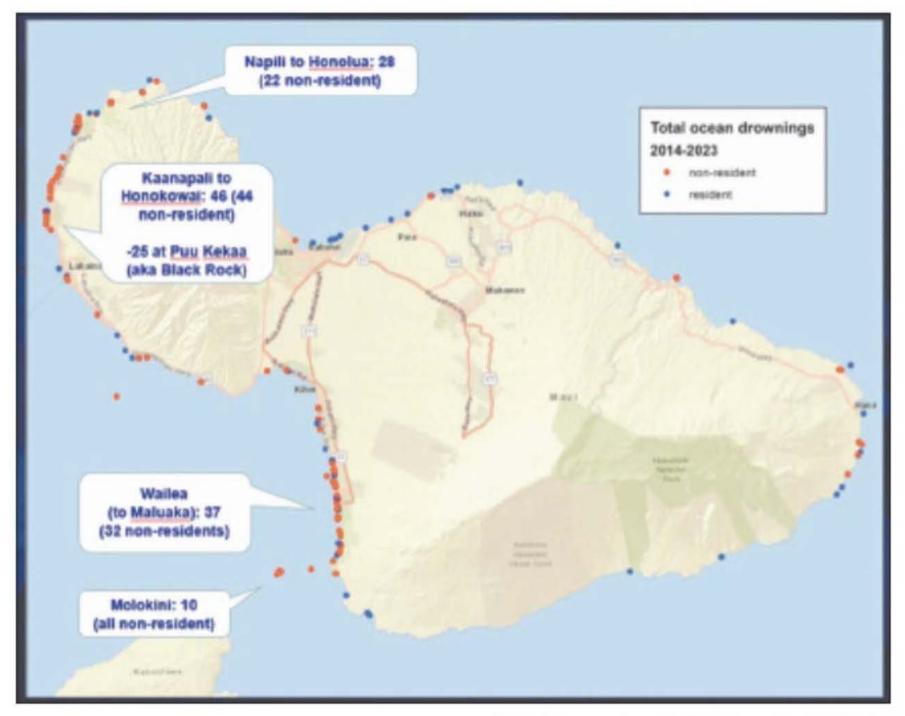
"We definitely support any type of partnership that can be arranged," she said.

Cooper said a lot of the tourists who frequent Maui's beaches are not staying at the hotels and visitors are responsible for their own safety.

County Department of Fire and Public Safety spokesperson Chris Stankis said the department has long supported the expansion of beach protection.

"We have been working since 2019 to secure permissions and go through the permitting process with the various landholders and entities in Kaanapali to place lifeguard towers on that beach, a process that we hope to bear fruit the next year." he said.

Stankis said the bureau worked in partnership with the visitors bureau to create a safety video that has been shown in the baggage collection area of Kahului Airport and shared multiple times on the county's social media platforms.



The latest available graph shows the locations of drownings on Maui for 10 years ending 2023.