Hawaii: Overview

Everything in the main manual and the skill guides applies in Hawaii exactly as written. What's different here is the specific hazard profile and the state, local, and legal context around it. This page is the starting point; the other three pages under Hawaii go deeper on laws, local resources, and the data behind the risks named here.

The 2023 Lahaina wildfire: the deadliest U.S. wildfire in over a century

On August 8, 2023, wind-driven fires fueled by dry invasive grasses tore through the historic town of Lahaina on Maui, killing at least 100-102 people and destroying more than 2,200 structures, roughly 81% of the town. It became the deadliest U.S. wildfire in more than 100 years and Hawaii's second-costliest disaster on record, behind only Hurricane Iniki in 1992. Unlike California and Oregon's forest-fire case studies, Lahaina's fire moved through a dense historic town built largely of wood, with limited evacuation routes, a combination that turned a fast-moving grass fire into a mass-casualty event. See the Risks page for the full data.

The 2018 Kilauea eruption: a hazard type new to this site

Beginning May 3, 2018, Kilauea's lower East Rift Zone erupted for months, sending lava flows across the Puna District that destroyed 723 structures, cut 50 kilometers of public roads, and forced roughly 3,000 residents to evacuate. This is the first volcanic hazard covered anywhere on this site, and it behaves differently from every other disaster type covered here: lava flows are slow enough that death tolls are typically low, but they permanently and irreversibly destroy everything in their path, land included, in a way a flood or fire's damaged structures can still be rebuilt on. See the Risks page for the full data.

What this means for how you use the rest of this manual

The manual's Tier structure and the skill guides apply without modification. What's different in Hawaii: evacuation planning matters even more than usual given how few routes exist off many parts of the islands, as Lahaina's fire demonstrated tragically, and residents on the Big Island near active rift zones face a genuinely different kind of long-term risk, permanent land loss, that this manual's disaster-recovery guidance doesn't fully address since most other hazards covered leave the underlying land intact.

Sources

- 2023 Lahaina wildfire data: Britannica; CNN
- 2018 Kilauea lower Puna eruption data: Wikipedia; USGS

Hawaii: Laws & Legal Considerations

Rainwater catchment: unrestricted, and a primary water source for tens of thousands

Hawaii doesn't just permit rainwater catchment, it's a genuinely mainstream primary water source on the islands, not a supplemental backup.

Rule	Hawaii
Source water	Rooftop catchment
Permit required for small systems	No, for exterior systems used for outdoor irrigation up to 360 gallons storage
Larger/domestic systems	Owned and operated by the homeowner; not regulated by the Department of Health or any other agency
Scale of use	An estimated 30,000-60,000 residents statewide rely on rain catchment for their water needs (2016-2020 estimates)

Where to find it: the Hawaii Department of Health Safe Drinking Water Branch (health.hawaii.gov/sdwb/raincatchment) publishes safety guidance for domestic catchment systems.

A live 2026 legislative push

HB1728 HD1, active as of 2026, would require all Hawaii counties to allow rainwater catchment installation statewide, closing gaps in current county-by-county zoning that still restrict it in some areas. This is a pending bill, not enacted law; confirm current status if reading this later.

Concealed carry: shall-issue only since 2022, after decades as effectively no-issue

Hawaii's transition to shall-issue concealed carry is one of the most dramatic legal shifts covered on this site.

Requirement	Detail
Pre-2022 status	Nominally 'may-issue' but functioned in practice as effectively no-issue for decades
2022 change	The Supreme Court's Bruen decision (June 2022) forced Hawaii to become genuinely shall-issue: the issuing authority must grant a permit if the applicant meets all legal requirements
Issuing authority	County Chief of Police
Firearm acquisition (separate from carry)	Minimum age 21, a permit-to-acquire required for each purchase, fingerprinting and background check, plus a 14-day waiting period
2026 development	A Supreme Court ruling (Wolford v. Lopez) held that a permit holder may carry onto publicly accessible private property unless the owner affirmatively posts a 'no firearms' sign or tells the carrier to leave

The most dramatic legal shift on the site

No other state covered here went from a decades-long, effectively no-issue system to shall-issue this abruptly. Hawaii’s carry law today looks nothing like it did before 2022, which is worth keeping in mind since older sources describing Hawaii’s gun laws may no longer reflect the current, post-Bruen legal reality.

Sources

- Hawaii rainwater catchment rules and usage scale: Hawaii Department of Health; Grassroot Institute of Hawaii
- Hawaii’s shift to shall-issue concealed carry post-Bruen: USCCA
- Wolford v. Lopez (2026) and carry on private property: Wikipedia; Hawaii News Now

Hawaii: Local Resources

Hawaii Emergency Management Agency (HI-EMA)

HI-EMA, headquartered inside Diamond Head Crater, serves as the coordinating agency across Hawaii's four county emergency management agencies and as the state's official Warning Point, managing the full disaster lifecycle from mitigation through recovery.

Where to find it: dod.hawaii.gov/hiema.

University of Hawaii: Master Gardener Program

University of Hawaii Cooperative Extension Service runs the same category of program as every other state covered on this site, active since 1982.

- **University of Hawaii Master Gardener Program**: nationally recognized certification training in horticultural education and sustainable practices, run by University Educators, Specialists, and Researchers, with volunteers extending outreach efforts to the general public and community groups.

Where to find it: ctahr.hawaii.edu/uhmg lists island-specific chapters.

CERT: county-run, with Honolulu's program the largest

CERT training in Hawaii runs through each county's own emergency management department. Honolulu's Department of Emergency Management offers free CERT classes across multiple required sessions to reach full certification, the largest program among the four counties given Oahu's population.

Four counties, four separate programs

Unlike a single statewide CERT curriculum, Hawaii's CERT training is organized independently by each of its four county emergency management departments (Honolulu, Maui, Hawaii, and Kauai counties). Residents should check with their own county's department for the current schedule and requirements.

Where to find it: dod.hawaii.gov/hiema/emergency-response-training-sign-up lists current training opportunities statewide.

Sources

- HI-EMA structure and mission: Hawaii Emergency Management Agency
- University of Hawaii Master Gardener Program history: University of Hawaii CTAHR
- Hawaii county CERT programs: Hawaii Emergency Management Agency

Hawaii: Risks & Trends

Same standard as every other page on this site: every figure below is independently sourced, and figures that vary across sources, or measure genuinely different things, are flagged as such rather than collapsed into one number that looks more precise than the underlying data actually supports.

The 2023 Lahaina wildfire

Metric	Figure
Date ignited	August 8, 2023
Deaths	100-102 (sources vary slightly as the final count was confirmed)
Structures destroyed	2,200+, roughly 81% of Lahaina
Total damage	$5.5 billion
Insured losses	$3.4 billion
Historical ranking	Deadliest U.S. wildfire in over a century; Hawaii's second-costliest disaster on record after Hurricane Iniki (1992)

Why this fire was so much deadlier than a comparable mainland wildfire

Lahaina’s fire moved through a dense historic town, much of it wood-frame construction, with a limited number of roads out and high winds from a passing hurricane offshore accelerating the spread. California and Oregon’s wildfire case studies on this site mostly describe fires moving through forested or suburban terrain with more evacuation options; Lahaina’s combination of density, construction materials, and route scarcity is a materially different risk profile.

The 2018 Kilauea lower Puna eruption

Metric	Figure
Eruption start	May 3, 2018
Land inundated	32.4 sq km in the Puna District
Structures destroyed	723
Roads cut	50 km of public roads, including two major highways
Residents evacuated	~3,000
Injuries	24
Property damage	~$800 million (2018 USD)
Notable infrastructure loss	Puna Geothermal Venture, ~25% of the Big Island's electricity supply, shut down and later damaged by lava

A hazard that doesn't behave like the others on this site

Lava flows move slowly enough that Kilauea’s 2018 eruption caused zero direct deaths despite destroying hundreds of homes, but the land itself, not just the structures on it, is often permanently lost or buried. Every other disaster covered on this site leaves land that can eventually be rebuilt on; volcanic hazard is the exception.

Sources

- 2023 Lahaina wildfire data: Britannica; CNN
- 2018 Kilauea lower Puna eruption data: Wikipedia; USGS