



Hawai'i Volcanoes News Release

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Park Adapts to Elevated SO₂ Levels



*Scientist Jeff Sutton of the USGS
Hawaiian Volcano Observatory gathers
a gas sample at Kilauea's summit
Photo by Tamar Elias*

Since mid-January, scientists at the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory have recorded elevated sulfur dioxide levels at the summit of Kilauea in an area adjacent to Halema'uma'u crater, a popular park overlook.

Although the volcanic gas is always present at Kilauea's summit, typical concentrations are usually dispersed by the normal trade winds.

During the past month, levels as high as 10 ppm have occurred in a narrow band south/southwest of Halema'uma'u. Studies indicate that 10 to 15 ppm concentrations of sulfur dioxide is a threshold of toxicity for prolonged human exposure. Exposure to sulfur dioxide can aggravate pre-existing heart and breathing problems such as asthma.

The sustained gas levels have prompted the park to adjust visitation to this area to protect visitors and staff.

In response to the elevated SO₂ levels, Superintendent Cindy Orlando has issued the following orders:

- Four miles of Crater Rim Drive (from Jaggar Museum to Chain of Craters Road) are open to drive-through visitation only. No parking or stopping is allowed at any pullout, parking lot, or shoulder including the Southwest Rift, Halema'uma'u crater, and Keanakako'i crater. Visitors are advised to drive through this area with their car windows closed and their air conditioner on recirculation mode.
- Five miles of Crater Rim Trail (from Jaggar Museum to Chain of Craters), and other summit trails leading to Halema'uma'u, are closed to hikers
- The park has postponed all work projects in the affected area.

The closures, signed and marked by traffic cones, will remain in effect until SO₂ levels return to normal.

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