



Hawai'i Volcanoes News Release

April 23, 2010

Eruption Duty Rangers Honored by Andrew Clark Hecht Public Safety Achievement Award



From left to right, those honored include Rob Ely, John Moraes, Greg Santos, Gail Minami, Kelly Wooten, Heidi Lee, and Arnold Nakata. Halema'uma'u Crater erupts in the background, emitting on average 800 tons of sulfur dioxide a day. Photo by Jay Robinson

Hawai'i Volcanoes' eruption duty rangers and their supervisor received the 2009 Andrew Clark Hecht Public Safety Achievement Award, the highest award bestowed by the National Park Service for outstanding achievement in public and employee safety.

The seven-person team that includes Supervisory Park Ranger Gail Minami and park rangers Rob Ely, Heidi Lee, John Moraes, Arnold Nakata, Greg Santos, and Kelly Wooten, is recognized for their efforts to prevent serious injuries and fatalities.

"Our team emerged from a very strong field of candidates for this award and their accomplishments are truly impressive," said Superintendent Cindy Orlando. "Their efforts to increase visitor awareness and safety in a high hazard environment are commendable and the number of visitor contacts amazing!"

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Hawai'i Volcanoes encompasses two of the world's most active volcanoes, Kīlauea and Mauna Loa. Kīlauea is erupting at its summit and on its east rift zone. The dynamic nature of active volcanism attracts and enthralls. It also poses numerous hazards to visitors—some obvious, some hidden.

For the 20 or so years prior to the start of Kīlauea's 2008 summit eruption, sulfur dioxide (SO₂) emissions from Halema'uma'u were modest, averaging about 200 tons a day. But as magma got closer to the surface in early 2008, summit emissions climbed four-fold to about 800 tons each day.

Inhaling sulfur dioxide, an invisible gas, is associated with increased respiratory symptoms and disease, difficulty in breathing, and premature death.

The team's actions that helped earn the award include:

- Contacted nearly a million park visitors to explain volcanic activity and share personal safety information in regards to elevated levels of SO₂
- Developed a park wide SO₂ monitoring program that uses 70 individual gas badges and obtained qualifications to repair, test, and certify the units. The strategy empowers park personnel to reduce their exposure to high levels of SO₂ in the work environment
- Responded to multiple incidents of visitors entering areas closed due to hazards of elevated SO₂ gas and threats of explosive eruptions
- Erected barriers, signs, and other controls to keep visitors out of hazardous areas
- Performed all the groundwork to carry out two park wide multi-day closures due to extreme SO₂ levels
- During 93 gas events over a 21 month period, performed all the groundwork to implement 34 temporary closures of specific visitor use sites due to extreme SO₂ levels
- Along with the park's safety officer, developed response protocols to deal with fluctuating SO₂ levels at Jaggar Museum while maintaining operations and visitation in accord with federal health standards
- Implemented use of a clinometer to measure the altitude of aircraft to determine their location in relation to temporary flight restrictions due to volcanic ash and gas hazards. Reported 24 incidents to the Federal Aviation Administration for follow-up

The team was also recognized for assisting County of Hawaii in planning and providing for visitor access and viewing of active lava flows in Kalapana. They trained county workers in interpreting lava flows and educated them on the hazards and mitigations associated with lava flow viewing; helped build trails and establish viewing sites; responded to medical emergencies and search and rescues; and provided interpretation of the on-going eruption to 77,000 visitors over a 35-day period.

The Andrew Clark Hecht Memorial Public Safety Achievement Award is in memory of Andrew Clark Hecht, the nine year-old son of Dr. James and Amy Hecht who died in 1970 as a result of an accident in Yellowstone National Park's Crested Pool.

The award includes a plaque and a \$1500 contribution to the park's safety program.

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