

Hawaii Slow to Recover From Earthquakes

by AP-News

KAILUA-KONA, Hawaii - Deep cracks line the outside walls of Hulihee Palace. Patches of fallen stucco expose the building's lava rock and coral mortar outer walls. Two quakes a year ago Monday damaged the 19th-century vacation home of Hawaii's royal families _ now a museum _ and many other buildings and infrastructure, though no one died or was seriously injured.

Like the former royal palace, many buildings on Hawaii's largest island still sit unrepaired because too few contractors have stepped forward to bid for reconstruction projects, officials said.

"This was the first earthquake of 6.0 or higher in 15 or 16 years, and this caused problems with preparation and response," said Hawaii County Mayor Harry Kim.

The two earthquakes, the first at 7:07 a.m. and the second a few minutes later, registered 6.7 and 6.0 on the Richter scale. Both were centered off the northwest coast of Hawaii Island, known as the Big Island, which suffered the heaviest damage.

Damage to Hawaii County buildings, facilities and roads totaled about \$20 million, and the figure is expected to rise because some bids for repairs are coming in at double the original estimate, Kim said.

The county declared 67 buildings unsafe after the quake; 22 are still considered so, Kim's office said. A total of 227 other buildings were initially declared safe for only restricted use, and 72 still carry the designation.

At the Hulihee Palace, built in 1838, a faded green sign saying "Restricted Use" remains on the door. Only the entry hall and one room remain open to the public, and nearly all artifacts have been removed. Repairs and restoration costs for the palace alone are expected to reach \$1 million.

The museum has lined up money for the work, which likely won't start until next year, said palace administrator Fanny Au Hoy.

The Federal Emergency Management Administration is paying 75 percent of the cost to repair bridges, roads and ditches and other county facilities; the county will pay the remaining 25 percent, Kim said.

The county's top priorities are to repair two damaged reservoirs and a gym in South Kohala, Kim said.

One reservoir has been drained because of structural damage, and the other is full to a level just below the cracks. For now, the partially refilled reservoir and a third reservoir can meet the area's water needs, he said.

The Hisaoka Gym in Kapaau, a frequently used community center, may not reopen for another year, he said.

Even the upscale Mauna Kea Beach Hotel, which officials originally believed was not too badly damaged and did not immediately close, won't reopen for another two years after a closer look uncovered more severe effects.

Homeowners who have taken a financial hit are also a concern, the mayor said.

"Many people were stunned to find out that their homeowners insurance doesn't cover earthquake damage," he said, adding that he hopes to get Congress to look at the situation.

By RON STATON, Associated Press Writer

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