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Hurricane Winds Fan Deadly Maui Wildfires: At Least 36 Dead

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The Waiola Church in Lahaina was consumed by fire. By. MATTHEW THAYER/THE MAUI NEWS

Hurricane winds have exacerbated wildfires in Maui, Hawaii, leading to the death of at least 36 individuals, officials confirmed. The devastating blazes have predominantly affected the Lahaina area on Maui's west coast. Maui County Mayor Richard Bissen disclosed during a press briefing that many structures "have been burned to the ground."

Over 271 structures in the region have been reported damaged or entirely destroyed. Aerial footage from the ravaged Lahaina painted a heart-wrenching picture with its iconic Front Street, once a bustling hub for tourists shopping and dining, now lying in ruins. The waterfront exhibited

remnants of the disaster with heaps of smoldering debris, burnt boats in the harbor, and smoke veiling the stark remains of scorched trees.

The power of Hurricane Dora, which brushed past south of the island chain, was a significant factor in the formidable winds that fanned the flames. This information was provided by the National Weather Service.

On the logistical front, relief efforts are in full swing. Over 2,100 residents found shelter in evacuation centers on Tuesday night. Additionally, the cancellation of numerous flights left around 2,000 travelers seeking refuge at Kahului Airport. As a proactive measure, arrangements are underway to prepare the Hawaii Convention Center in Honolulu to accommodate thousands of affected tourists and locals.

A glimmer of hope surfaced as winds started to ease on Maui. Consequently, some flights were reinstated by Wednesday, allowing for a clearer aerial assessment of the overall damage.

Given the gravity of the situation, President Joe Biden has pledged comprehensive federal support. In a statement, he expressed sympathy, stating, "Our prayers are with those who have seen their homes, businesses, and communities destroyed." He further shared that the Hawaii National Guard is deploying Chinook helicopters to bolster fire suppression and facilitate search and rescue missions on Maui.

Communication has been a significant challenge. Approximately 14,500 Maui residents were grappling with power outages by Wednesday morning. Disruptions in cell service and phone connectivity hindered many from reaching out to their loved ones residing near the wildfire zones. Desperate for information, several individuals have resorted to posting messages on social media platforms in an attempt to make contact.