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# 55 Dead in Maui as Wildfires Declared Hawaii's Worst Natural Disaster in History

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**Cars charred by the wildfire lay amidst the devastation in Lahaina, Hawaii. By. TIFFANY KIDDER WINN**

In what is being labeled as Hawaii's most severe natural disaster, Governor Josh Green revealed the catastrophic effects of the recent wildfires that have devastated Maui. President Biden has subsequently declared a major disaster in the state.

Dramatic footage from Lahaina, a town of 12,000 residents in Maui, exhibited structures, palm trees, and vehicles being consumed by violent flames. By Thursday, the once bustling Lahaina, known for its surf shops, eateries, and homes, was reduced to mere ash and smoldering remnants. The town's iconic 150-year-old banyan tree, a significant landmark of Lahaina's downtown, was

also affected by the blaze. Officials announced that by Thursday afternoon, 80 percent of the fire had been contained.

Governor Green, visibly shaken at a press briefing, remarked, "The sheer scale of Lahaina's devastation is bound to be shocking." He went on to detail the obliteration of approximately 1,000 structures, and highlighted the current need for 2,000 rooms to accommodate those displaced. The natural disaster has left 55 people dead, and the latest count is not expected to be final, according to the governor.

Apart from Lahaina, Pulehu witnessed a conflagration that was 70 percent contained, while the extent of the fire in Upcountry, which encompasses the Haleakala National Park, remains uncertain. Preliminary estimates suggest that the latter blaze has consumed over 1,000 acres.

The origins of these fires, which ignited earlier in the week, remain undetermined, but they were aided by winds from [Hurricane Dora](#). Officials confessed their underestimation of the fire's rapid advance into populated zones in Lahaina, which rendered communication amongst first responders intermittently impossible.

Eyewitness accounts from Lahaina's residents depicted the fire's initial deceptive calmness, which spiraled into a deadly inferno propelled by gusts reaching up to 60 mph. Several had to resort to the ocean to escape the engulfing flames, with the Coast Guard confirming the rescue of 14 individuals from the waters.

Infrastructure too bore the brunt, with around 11,000 individuals rendered powerless in west Maui. Both cellular and landline services were disrupted.

This disaster is anticipated to severely impact Maui's burgeoning tourism sector. Figures from the state's Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism indicate that the island welcomed 1.5 million tourists in the year's first half, a 5.7% spike compared to 2022. Tourists injected a whopping \$3.47 billion into the economy, marking a 25% ascent from the previous year. AccuWeather predicts that Hawaii will bear economic losses ranging between \$8 billion to \$10 billion due to these fires.

Six shelters in Maui were providing refuge to over 2,000 individuals as of Thursday, as per FEMA's data.

Addressing the crisis, President Biden, ahead of his speech in Utah on Thursday, asserted that the nation's complete resources would be at Hawaii's disposal. He stated, "Our prayers are with the people of Hawaii, but not just our prayers. Every asset we have will be available."

The global scene too looks bleak with wildfires and climatic extremities creating havoc in nations such as Greece, Portugal, and Canada. July was recorded as the hottest month globally. Reflecting on this grim reality, Mr. Green emphasized, "What you're witnessing with this fire is the undeniable footprint of climate change, which is now affecting the islands."