



Case Study: Mortuary Services after a Wildfire

March, 2025

Maui, Hawaii

- The Maui wildfires took the lives of 102 people
- The federal Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Teams (DMORT) were deployed to assist with mortuary affairs
- DMORT basics:
 - DMORT works collaboratively with the local teams of medical examiners and coroners, who are currently overwhelmed
 - First a DMORT assessment team is sent to determine what DMORT can contribute to the response
 - Then a strike team may be deployed that includes forensic staff, x-ray technicians, pathologists (many are funeral directors), anthropologists, dentists, and more
 - They can also provide resources to stand up a temporary coroner/medical examiner's office
 - A full DMORT team consists of 65 members, and the number of people sent depends on ASPRs assessment
 - If shipping by ground, they can provide 53-foot refrigerated carriers or dry box containers and can track where it is enroute and if shipping by air carrier, they load carrier and are at the mercy of local airport staff as to when it arrives
 - Their base is on east coast, with most of their equipment in Maryland and Washington, DC
- In the Maui response, an assessment team of five was first sent; it included a commander, deputy commander, forensic specialist, a victim identification center (VIC) member and another team member
- The local ME office had only ten staff, so DMORT chose to set up a temporary morgue outside of that building
- DMORT then deployed about 18 people to the coroner's office and about 25 to the VIC, which was set up as a family assistance center
- Because they had to deploy resources by air, they did encounter some challenges in regards to time of arrival
- There was a five-hour time difference between their home base and Maui, so resource requests were challenging
- Because there were burn victims, identifying remains was more challenging – anthropologists helped a lot with that
- The only people that met with family members were the staff in the VIC, and the local coroner and medical examiner were the only ones that made the positive ID
- The VIC staff worked with families to gather antemortem information, medical records, and DNA to help identify the victims

Impacts:

- Decedent storage

- Victim identification
- Family Assistance
- Forensics
- PPE and safe handling of decedents

Preparedness:

- Mass fatality
- Family Assistance Center
- COOP
- Evacuation
- Recovery planning
- Risk communications

Sources:

- [Managing Mortuary Services After the Maui Wildfires](#)

Resources:

- ASPR TRACIE: [Fatality Management](#)
- Managing Mass Fatalities: [A Toolkit for Planning](#)
- FEMA: [Fatality Management](#)