

AVIATION NEWS BITS

FIREFIGHTERS LEAVE KALAUPAPA: STATE REMOVES AIRPORT'S ONLY FIRST RESPONDERS.

MOLOKAI, Hawaii (USA) - For the past year residents of Kalaupapa have rested a little easier knowing that first responders were manning their secluded airport. However, a recent change in federal regulations will leave the peninsula without firefighters.

"We are very, very disappointed that the airports division has eliminated firefighter services at the airport in Kalaupapa," said Steven Prokop, National Parks Service (NPS) superintendent.



As of July 1 the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) no longer requires the presence of fire personnel at Class III airports, serving planes carrying less than 10 people.

Residents Respond

"I think it is important (to have firefighters) because right now we only have 26 patients left," said Gloria Marks, Kalaupapa resident. She was off-island when she heard of the removal of the firefighters, and said she feels the services are needed.

"A lot of accidents happen at the airport," Marks said. "By the time (NPS) reach down there, it is too late."

Marks runs Damien Tours, the only tour provider in Kalaupapa. She said with the recent canonization of Father Damien the company is expecting an increase in visitors to the peninsula. "We are going to have a lot of people coming in, and we are going to need a lot of security, a lot of help."

"If the fire station is there at the airport they can solve a lot of problems," Marks said. "It is good for the people; they know they are on the safe side."

Senator J. Kalani English commented that residents

of Kalaupapa should not be alarmed, because the peninsula did not have firefighters previous to 2007 and he could not recall any airport incidences that required the assistance of emergency personnel.

Firefighters arrived in Kalaupapa in June 2007 as part of an FAA certificate requirement of Part 139. Crews from Molokai, Maui, and Lanai started from scratch, helping to maintain the area and provide services when needed.

"Working in Kalaupapa was probably the most satisfying job I've ever done," said Emerson Makekai, Ho'olehua Airport Fire Captain. He worked in Kalaupapa throughout the past year, and said the firefighters were needed and appreciated.

The services were primarily limited to daytime operations on the airfield, with one firefighter coming in every three days. However, it was not unheard of for the fire personnel to volunteer after hours, according to Emerson.

Agency Response

"I like the fact that we have been able to support the airport operations and community down there," said Marvin Moniz, Maui District Airport manager. He said while there have been staffing and costs issues, "overall I think community has been happy to have medical responders."

According to Moniz, Airport Operation and Maintenance employee Bob Florek will take over airport operations that may have previously been handled by the firefighters. He will have access to equipment, and receive certification in CPR.

While NPS is currently working on hiring additional first aid and emergency medical and fire responders, the agency "does not have the expertise or staff to adequately respond to an incident at the airport," Prokop said.

The peninsula is "fully staffed and serviced with a hospital with top medical care," Sen. English said, adding that should there be a need, "Kalaupapa is small enough that the medical care can get there in time."

However, according to Prokop, it would take at least an hour for a major medical emergency or fire to receive outside aid. The surrender of the certificate under Part 139 will also affect airports in Waimea on the Big Island and Hana on Maui, but the two locations both have emergency responders in close proximity to the airports.

Prokop said there have been several instances where