



# News Release

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## Future looks better with cave rescue training

POHAKULOA TRAINING AREA, Hawaii—If a day comes when someone wanders and gets lost in a lava tube on the Big Island, the community can be reassured that there will be folks ready to rescue them.

Pōhakuloa Training Area (PTA) cultural resources staff and members of the PTA fire department attended the 2-day cave rescue training, which gave individuals a better understanding of the challenges involved in a cave rescue scenario.

Jansen Cardy, lead instructor, coordinated the event. Cardy has extensive experiences with cave rescue and is trained as an instructor by the National Cave Rescue Commission. He was assisted by PTA cultural resources staff temporary hires, and highly experienced cavers, Steve Lewis, Don Coons and Rachel Myron. Lewis and Myron played the roles of the missing hikers while Coons sought help at PTA during the mock rescue scenario exercise.

This is the second cave rescue training exercise conducted at PTA; the first occurred in May 2006.

“Although a cave rescue has never occurred at PTA, what to do and how to do it if the situation presents itself is essential,” said Bill Godby, PTA archaeologist.

Godby noted that “as first responders, the PTA fire department graciously stepped forward to partner with the cave team and receive this training, in addition to purchasing equipment to support a rescue in this unique environment.”

The participants spent the first half-day understanding classroom concepts, knowing how to “package” a victim, using neck braces, and the use of the gurney to move a victim.

Coons was used as the victim, and participants dragged the victim while crawling underneath the class tables, used the turtle technique (where participants knelt with their hands and knees while dragging the victim across their backs), and moved the victim under and above fire trucks. The afternoon ended with participants practicing their skills at a lava tube in an area known as the Catacombs, at the southeast corner of PTA. Participants prepped themselves with their cave gear, which included helmets with lights, elbow and knee pads.

On Day 2, participants acted on a mock rescue scenario wherein a hiker arrives at the cultural resources’ building to seek help for two lost buddies who needed help out of a lava tube in the southeast location of PTA. With maps on hand, the hiker points out the general location on the map to fire rescue and cultural resources team.

The PTA rescue teams arrived at the location and carried their emergency rescue equipment with them. Two teams were tasked to do the search as there were numerous lava tube entrances to search in. The first several searches resulted with no one found, but about a quarter mile away from where their emergency vehicles, they found the two missing hikers. Although it was a five minute hike into the lava tube, it would take almost an hour before they would emerge from the entrance. One victim was secured in a gurney while the other hiker assisted out of the lava tube.

Several issues were learned from the training.

“I gained an appreciation for the logistical and physical challenges involved with a cave rescue,” said Shane Rumsey, PTA cultural resource specialist. “I believe that proper preparation can go a long way to help prevent cave related emergencies when working in caves. It is good to know that in case of an emergency, PTA first responders are more familiar with the unique challenges associated within a cave environment.”

Coordination was essential during rescue operations, including knowing the actual techniques of cave rescue like patient care and stabilization, handling and movement through potentially dangerous underground passages, and putting it into practice.

“I learned a great deal of the complexities of coordinating a cave rescue,” said Thomas Wolforth, PTA cultural resource specialist, “and the coordination required between first responders and archaeologists. The experience was invigorating, and I felt that this training has paid off for me with increased awareness of the work required by the PTA fire department crew if needed within these caves.”

It was important to establish an incident commander, as communication was essential to establish current situation, the number of people on the team, and the location of the rescue team members. Although it was difficult to communicate once inside the lava tube, there were potential information relays wherever there were cracks in the lava tube.

Two cultural resources staff understood very well the need for cave rescue training.

“It was impressive to watch our emergency medical professionals carry out their jobs,” said Julie M.E. Taomia, PTA senior cultural resource specialist. “I feel good about caving and the potential for rescue should the need arise.”

“I was able to understand the difficulty in evacuating an injured person from a cave environment and that team work approach was important to make this happen,” said James

Head, cultural resources specialist, who happened to injure his ankle on Day One. “Cave safety is paramount, and there is a need to be aware of what you are doing because nobody wants to be the next ‘patient’.”