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Column: First responder campus a sound investment

By Karl Kim • Today • Updated 9:46 pm

A bold plan to build a state-of-the-art first responder training and technology center in Mililani has emerged. This campus offers key benefits to our first responders and many of us working on community resilience. We need to come together to support this initiative, share assets and resources, and work collaboratively to build and sustain disaster response and recovery capabilities. There are five reasons why this plan makes good sense.

First, due to climate change and increased threats from natural and human-caused hazards, we must invest in community resilience through training and technologies to support damage assessment, situational awareness, communications and coordination, and effective response and recovery. As the most isolated community on the planet, we need integrated systems to prepare for, respond to, mitigate and recover from disasters. Unlike other states connected by highways and rail lines, we have limited mutual aid and assistance from neighboring jurisdictions.

Second, the site is centrally located, away from coastal and sea level rise hazards and adjacent to military and other assets that will be mobilized during a significant disaster. The campus offers a protected location for servers, telecommunications, and information technology systems necessary to support emergency response and recovery. It will provide critically needed redundancies, storage, and backup with strategic locational advantages for the distribution and delivery of emergency supplies, equipment, and personnel.

Third, we need improved facilities for training and education and capacity-building. It is expensive and difficult to send our first responders and others to the continent for training and professional development on how to use specialized equipment for search and rescue, respond to hazmat events, conduct damage assessments, provide emergency medical services and mass care to hasten disaster recovery. The campus will provide much needed space for training and housing responders, subject matter experts, and professionals engaged in resilience building. Training together across disciplines improves performance when disasters strike.

Fourth, we can leverage resources from federal, state, international and donor agencies to support investment on disaster preparedness, response and mitigation. The site also provides unique opportunities to develop and test nature-based solutions for mitigating hazards. In addition to supporting neighbor island emergency managers and first responders, the campus can host and support those from Guam, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands and American Samoa, as well as from the Marshall Islands and Micronesia and international agencies involved in response and recovery. Investment in resilience training and capacity-building produce long-term savings, benefits, and dividends that greatly exceed the costs.

Fifth, investment in the technology campus will diversify and support economic and workforce development. From integration of satellite and remote sensing, robotics, artificial intelligence, cyber capabilities, logistics, decision-support, and smart, connected systems, the campus can be a hub for innovation, development and testing of affordable, green, resilient solutions. We can link high technology, university research and development and local talent to foster innovation directed at increasing safety and security and creating new jobs and livelihoods. We can use the campus to reduce brain drain and strengthen human capital, our greatest asset.



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Our first responders need to be supported with the best equipment, training and technologies to save lives, reduce losses and minimize disruption from disasters. We need to broaden access, participation and investment in resilience. We need facilities that will be utilized before, during, and after hazard events. The campus will provide training during peace time and used for backup emergency operations during actual disasters. Training, exercises, drills and capacity building must include community leaders, residents, businesses, institutions and organizations committed to sustaining a resilient future for us all.

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