

Survivors say roads were blocked as raging fire swept through Lahaina



Many say Front Street became a traffic jam.

By HNN Staff

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HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) - Survivors say road blocks and confusing communication contributed to the chaos in [Lahaina on the night of the deadly fire](#).

Many say Front Street became a traffic jam, trapping many in their cars.

Video of the aftermath shows lines of charred cars.

The Associated Press also reports that utility crews blocked at least one road out of Lahaina and were trying to turn drivers back toward town to prevent them from driving over downed power lines.

One family ignored the barricade and drove to safety.

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Another family turned out of standstill traffic onto a dirt road to eventually get to Napili. A third family drove the wrong way down Front Street to escape the firestorm.

Kim Cuevas-Reyes told AP she narrowly escaped the flames with her 12- and 15-year-old by ignoring instructions to turn right on Front Street toward Lahaina's Civic Center, which had been an evacuation shelter.

Instead, she took a left, driving in the wrong lane to pass a stack of cars heading in the other direction.

"The gridlock would have left us there when the firestorm came," said Cuevas-Reyes, 38.

"I would have had to tell my children to jump into the ocean as well and be boiled alive by the flames or we would have just died from smoke inhalation and roasted in the car."

Survivors say by about 4 p.m., the town was fully engulfed in flames and hot winds burned their skin. More than 100 people died in the flames, including a number of people in cars.

Also potentially adding to the confusion: Just after 6 p.m on Aug. 8, Maui County Mayor Richard Bissen announced on another local TV station that the road was open to and from Lahaina.

CBS News asked Maui County for a response regarding those comments but has not heard back.



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Maui Police Chief John Pelletier addressed the issue the most recent press conference while the mayor spoke about it, in a [social media post](#) Wednesday.

Pelletier defended the department saying they did not close or stop people from getting out of Lahaina, they were helping them evacuate.

"If there is a downed power line, that was live, we want to make sure you didn't go over a downed power line. Police officers that night, that day, that afternoon, they were driving up and down with their PA's pleading with people to get out. They were knocking on doors. They were doing everything they can. They knocked down a fence on Lahainaluna to get people out because they needed to get out."

Bissen called the situation "fluid" and "dynamic." He said downed powerlines and parked cars made it difficult to get people out on time.

"The police did go door to door according to the chief to notify people, as well as on their speakers. To let people know what was happening. But, I think the important part to know is they did try to send people to the safest exit at that moment, and that changed in some of these situations."

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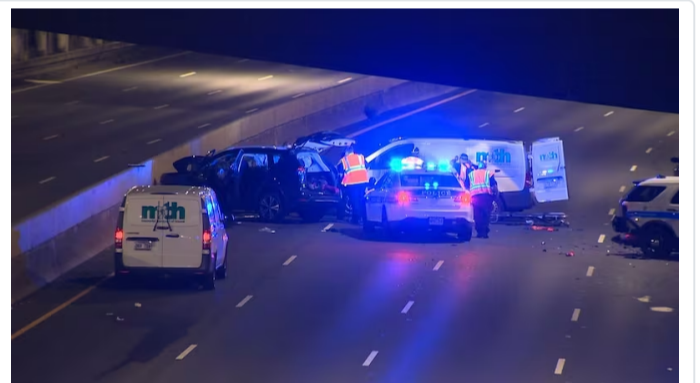
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