Lava flowing from Hawaii's Kilauea volcano destroys 9 homes

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The number of homes destroyed by lava shooting out of openings in the ground created by Hawaii's Kilauea volcano climbed to nine Sunday as some of the more than 1,700 people who evacuated prepared for the possibility they may not return for quite some time.  
"I have no idea how soon we can get back," said Todd Corrigan, who left his home in Leilani Estates with his wife on Friday as lava burst through the ground three or four blocks from their home. They spent the night on the beach in their car and began looking for a vacation rental.  
Hawaii County civil defense officials said two new fissures opened overnight, bringing the total to nine that opened in the neighborhood since Thursday. U.S. Geological Survey volcanologist Wendy Stovall said that with the two new fissures, the total was 10, though one of the new ones had already stopped producing lava.  
Scientists said Kilauea was likely to release more lava through additional vents, but they were unable to predict exactly where. Leilani Estates, a subdivision in the mostly rural district of Puna, is at greatest risk. Authorities ordered more than 1,700 residents to evacuate from there and nearby Lanipuna Gardens.  
Hundreds of small earthquakes continued to rumble through the area Saturday, one day after a magnitude-6.9 temblor hit — the largest earthquake to hit Hawaii in more than 40 years. Magma moving through Kilauea set off the earthquakes, said geologists, who warned of aftershocks.  
Authorities cautioned sulfuric gas pouring out of the vents also posed dangers, particularly to elderly and people with respiratory problems. Hawaii County civil defense officials said conditions permitting, some residents will be able to return home briefly to pick up medicine and vital documents or take care of pets.  
Tesha "Mirah" Montoya, 45, said the threat of toxic fumes wasn't enough to make her family evacuate, but the tipping point was the earthquakes.  
"I felt like the whole side of our hill was going to explode," she said. "The earthquake was what made us start running and start throwing guinea pigs and bunnies in the car."Montoya, her husband and daughter don't know how long they will be away from the three-story octagonal house they built nearly 20 years ago in a patch of "raw jungle.""My heart and soul's there," she said in a phone interview from a cabin on the north side of the Big Island, where the family had hunkered down. "I'm nothing without the land. It's part of my being."Gary McMillan said his home is about 3,000 feet (914 meters) from one of the fissures in Leilani Estates. He monitored remote cameras set up in his home and said his home was still intact.  
He's living out of his van with his wife at the nearby community center and constantly thinks about things they left behind, but understands why authorities evacuated residents.  
"I was a critical care nurse for 37 years, so I understand the health implications and the dangers involved," McMillan said.  
Kilauea has been continuously erupting since 1983 and is one of the world's most active volcanoes. In 2014, lava burned a house and smothered a cemetery as it approached Pahoa, the town closest to Leilani Estates. But this flow stalled just before it reached Pahoa's main road.  
Nearly 30 years ago, lava slowly covered an entire town, Kalapana, over the period of about a year.  
AP

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