

Hawaii names 388 people who are still unaccounted for after wildfires

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Maui County officials released a list of 388 people Thursday who "unaccounted for" after the devastating fires this month, as part of Hawaii's efforts to "un-duplicate" people reported missing. The validated list of names from the FBI released Thursday night is the first of its kind for unaccounted people since the Aug. 8 disaster in Lahaina, the country's most devastating wildfire in a century.

"We're releasing this list of names today because we know that it will help with the investigation," Maui Police Chief John Pelletier said in a news release. "We also know that once those names come out, it can and will cause pain for folks whose loved ones are listed. This is not an easy thing to do, but we want to make sure that we are doing everything we can to make this investigation as complete and thorough as possible."

Before the validated list was released, the estimated number of unaccounted people had fluctuated this week in what Hawaii Gov. Josh Green (D) described as the FBI's efforts to "un-duplicate" people reported missing. After Maui County Mayor Richard T. Bissen said Monday that the number of missing was believed to be at around 850, Steven Merrill, special agent in charge of the FBI's Honolulu division, estimated Tuesday that there were more than 1,000 in an unconfirmed list.

Merrill noted at a news conference this week that the efforts to confirm those who are unaccounted for have been complicated due to a lack of detail in some reports and the wide array of lists of tracking the unaccounted-for individuals.

First and last names were released Thursday, as well as reference ID numbers to track them. The list was validated by the FBI based on the first name and last name of a person, and whether there was a verified contact number for the person who reported the individual as unaccounted for. Officials also announced that as of Thursday afternoon, an additional 1,732 people who had originally been reported as unaccounted for had since been "found safe and well."

The update comes as Hawaiian Electric is facing at least nine lawsuits for its role in allegedly sparking the Maui wildfires, including the one that destroyed Lahaina and killed at least 115 people. Documents show that the Hawaii public utility hauled away fallen poles, power lines, transformers, conductors and other equipment from near a Lahaina substation starting around Aug. 12, before investigators from the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) arrived at the scene.

Two men describe their harrowing experience the day a wildfire erupted in Lahaina, Hawaii. The men hid behind a rock wall for eight hours to escape the flames. (Video: Reshma Kirpalani/The Washington Post)

Maui County on Thursday sued the Hawaii public utility for "inexcusably" not shutting off power despite being warned that high winds were coming, and not maintaining equipment and surrounding vegetation to "properly ensure that they would not cause a fire."

Officials have identified the remains of 46 of the 115 people as of Thursday, according to the Maui Police Department. The families of 35 of the 46 identified victims have been notified.

The county released eight names of victims Thursday, including a family whose remains were found in a burned car near their home. Tony Takafua, a 7-year-old boy; his mother, Salote Tone, 39; and his grandparents Faaoso Tone, 70, and Maluifonua Tone, 73, were among the victims, officials said. The 7-year-old boy is the first child victim from the fires, the county said.

Maui police are asking for the public's help in providing information about anyone who is reported unaccounted for and whose name is on this list. Officials are asking for anyone who recognizes a name on the list and knows the person to be safe to please contact the FBI at (808) 566-4300 or HN-COMMAND-POST@ic.fbi.gov as soon as possible.

"We understand that this is an incredibly difficult time for the families, and we ask that the media and the public respect the privacy of the grieving families," police said in a news release. "We will continue to work closely with the families to ensure that they are updated and supported throughout this process."

Allyson Chiu and Brianna Sacks contributed to this report.