

# THE AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS REVIEW

Sunday, August 20, 2023 | Today's Paper | Mind Games

## Maui emergency response chief falls on his sword over sirens

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

5:15PM AUGUST 18, 2023 • 2 COMMENTS

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A Maui County official criticised for his handling of the wildfire disaster that tore through Hawaii's historic Lahaina resigned on Thursday, citing health reasons.

Maui Emergency Management Agency administrator Herman Andaya tendered his resignation effective immediately, said West Maui County mayor Richard Bissen.

"Given the gravity of the crisis we are facing, my team and I will be placing someone in this key position as quickly as possible and I look forward to making that announcement soon," Mr Bissen said.

Mr Andaya said at a news briefing on Wednesday that he hadn't activated West Maui's 80 emergency sirens during the fires that decimated Lahaina, killing at least 111 people.

He defended the decision by saying the sirens were traditionally activated to warn residents of a tsunami or a hurricane and they might have sent people into the path of the August 8 wildfires.

“Had we sounded the siren that night, we were afraid people would have gone mauka (into the mountains); if that were the case, they would have gone into the fire,” he said.

Hawaii has what it says is one of the world’s largest networks of sirens to warn people of all kinds of events, including wildfires and hurricanes. In the wake of last week’s fires, many residents questioned why the emergency sirens weren’t activated. Other emergency alert systems, including broadcasts and cellphone notifications, were activated.

The sirens’ blasts are meant to alert people who might be away from phones or other types of communication that there could be a hazardous event in the area and to seek more information.

Hawaii sent out at least 15 alerts the day of the fires using its integrated public alert and warning system, which sends users mobile alerts in emergencies, said Jeremy Greenberg, director of the operations division at the Federal Emergency Management Agency, but “that fire moved so quickly, it likely impeded cell reception.”

*The Wall Street Journal*