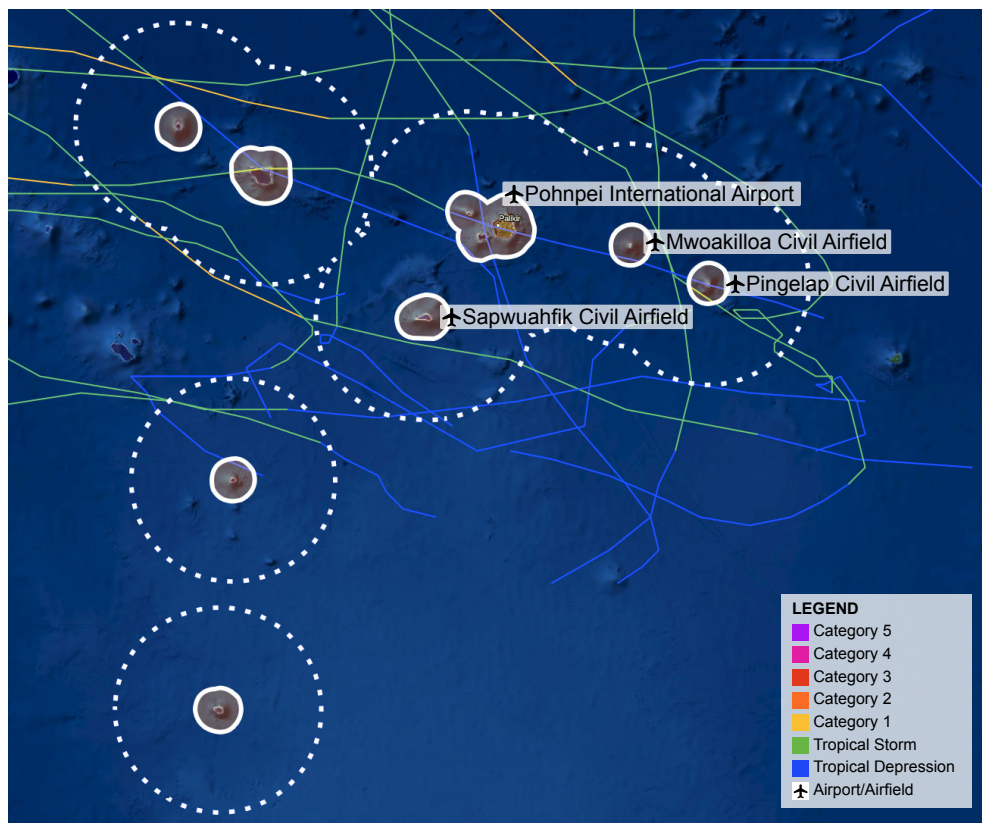


POHNPEI STATE HAZARDS & DISASTER MANAGEMENT

APRIL 2026

Pohnpei State, one of four states of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), is exposed to a range of hazards, including drought, flooding, landslides, and tropical cyclones, all of which pose a significant threat to lives, livelihoods, and infrastructure. Pohnpei State's disaster management system and institutions provide a solid foundation for hazard response, with established frameworks, plans, and standard operating procedures that align with national and regional disaster management strategies. However, geographic dispersion, limited transportation infrastructure, and dual-hatted leadership strain response capacity.



Tropical Cyclone Tracks around Pohnpei State (2000-2025). Source: NOAA

- **Multi-Hazard Environment:** Pohnpei State is exposed to drought, flooding, landslides, and tropical cyclones, and outer atolls are particularly vulnerable due to limited water supplies and food production.
- **Logistical Challenges in Disaster Response:** Disaster response is complicated by limited transportation infrastructure on outer islands, as only Mwoakilloa, Pingelap, and Sapwuahfik have airfields.
- **Foundational but Aging Disaster Management Frameworks:** Pohnpei's disaster management is guided by the 2002 Disaster Preparedness Plan and 2017 Standard Operating Procedures for Emergency and Disaster Response. While these frameworks provide a solid foundation for preparedness and response, there is growing recognition of the opportunity to update to address evolving risk, incorporate lessons, and align with best practices.
- **Need for Resilient Communication Systems:** Radio, cellular, and internet networks in Pohnpei are prone to outages, highlighting the urgent need for more robust communication infrastructure to ensure continuity during emergency operations.

State Facts

Pohnpei State's main island is the largest and tallest in FSM; it features rugged volcanic terrain with peaks reaching up to 790 meters (2,595 feet).



Capital: Kolonia



Total Population: 36,196*

- 34,789 on Pohnpei Island
- Outer Island Population: 1,407

*2010 was the last national census conducted in FSM



Total Land Area: 345.5 square kilometers (133.4 square miles)



State Government: Executive, legislative, and judicial



Local Government:

Governor: Chief Executive of Pohnpei State

12 Municipalities:

- Pohnpei Island – 5, each with two traditional leaders, the paramount chief (Nanmwarki) and secondary chief (Naniken)
- Outlying islands and atolls – 7



Languages: Pohnpeian and English; vernacular languages: Kapingamarangian, Mwoakilese, Nukuoroan, Pingelapese, and Sapwuahfijese



Airports and Civil Airfields:

- Pohnpei International Airport
Runway: 1,828 meters (6,000 feet)
- Mwoakilloa Civil Airfield
Runway: 365 meters (1,200 feet)
- Pingelap Civil Airfield
Runway: 365 meters (1,200 feet)
- Sapwuahfik Civil Airfield
Runway: 365 meters (1,200 feet)



POPULATION COUNT

Pohnpei Island - 34,789

Mwoakilloa - 133

Sapwuahfik - 456

Pingelap - 258

Nukuoro - 210

Kapingamarangi - 350

Pohnpei experiences coastal and inland flooding, landslides, tropical cyclones, and drought, with El Niño events intensifying weather variability.



Coastal Inundation

- **Frequency:** Coastal inundation occurs regularly, driven by a combination of king tides, tidal surges, and extreme waves.
- **Impacts:** Flooding and saltwater intrusion damage homes, infrastructure, and crops, worsening food and water security.



Flooding

- **Frequency:** Flooding is common during the wet season and during tropical cyclones, heavy rains, and king tides.
- **Impacts:** It damages homes, infrastructure, and crops, and contaminates freshwater, increasing waterborne disease risks.



Landslides

- **Frequency:** Landslides are recurrent due to Pohnpei's steep terrain and heavy rainfall, which drive erosion and debris flows.
- **Impacts:** Landslides can block roads, destroy homes, and isolate communities, disrupting their access to essential services.



Tropical Cyclones

- **Frequency:** Pohnpei lies south and east of the main typhoon belt, but it does experience short, severe tropical storms several times per decade.
- **Impacts:** Tropical cyclones damage homes, infrastructure, and crops. Storm surges and heavy rainfall compound flooding and landslide risks.



Drought

- **Frequency:** Drought typically occurs during El Niño events every 3-7 years.
- **Impacts:** Droughts cause severe water shortages—especially on outer islands reliant on rain catchment and shallow wells—and lead to crop failure, food insecurity, and heightened wildfire risk.

El Niño – Southern Oscillation (ENSO)

ENSO is a recurring climate cycle characterized by periodic warming (El Niño) and cooling (La Niña) of ocean surface temperatures in the equatorial Pacific. It impacts rainfall, air and ocean temperatures, tropical cyclone formation, and trade winds. El Niño events significantly reduce rainfall starting in November, and very strong El Niño events produce the driest conditions. El Niño also tends to shift the development of tropical cyclones eastward, increasing the risk of tropical cyclone activity from March through December of El Niño years. During La Niña phases, higher sea levels can drive more coastal flooding and erosion.



April 2000: A cholera outbreak was reported in Pohnpei State. On 9 May 2000, a state of emergency was declared with a request for assistance from the Pacific Community (SPC) and the World Health Organization. In total, 3,452 cases of cholera and 20 deaths were reported.



June 2002: Tropical Storm Chata'an affected the outer islands. One death was reported alongside destruction of a house and a weather station in Nukuoro.



December 2008: Extreme high tides and tidal surge led to coastal flooding. Homes and businesses were flooded, and 29 islands were completely inundated. Kapingamarangi's taro patches were completely flooded. Additionally, a concrete bridge connecting two islands collapsed.



2010: Drought affected the outer islands, where water supplies, food crops, and other vegetation were damaged. Kapingamarangi was the worst affected.



May 2015: In May 2015, Typhoon Dolphin passed northeast of Pohnpei. It caused damage to utilities and roads, uprooted trees and crops, and damaged over 246 homes.



2016: Unusually low precipitation led to drought. Rain catchments and river systems ran dry, and outer-island populations dependent on those systems suffered health impacts from limited water supply and sanitation. Over 40 wildfires were reported in the state.



March 2018: Tropical Depression Jelawat dumped heavy rains across Pohnpei. It washed out roads and led to numerous landslides. The Governor declared a state of emergency, which was followed by a national declaration of emergency and the release of disaster funds.



February 2019: Typhoon Wutip tracked close to the southwestern islands of Pohnpei and caused damage on the main island, Nukuoro, and Sapwuahfik. Primary and secondary power lines on the main island were damaged. In Nukuoro, saltwater intrusion damaged over 90% of crops.



2020: A drought throughout FSM left the entire country without sufficient safe water. Kapingamarangi Atoll had approximately 3.8 cubic meters (1,000 gallons) of water left in government catchments when the Governor sent an urgent request for potable water to the FSM President.



December 2021: A combination of king tides, a northerly swell, and elevated sea levels driven by a La Niña cycle, led to coastal flooding and inundation of homes, crops, and infrastructure in Pohnpei State.



January 2024: A strong winter storm in the northern Pacific generated massive swells that reached FSM; they inundated homes and taro patches in Kapingamarangi.



2024: El Niño-driven dry weather led to drought conditions throughout FSM. Pohnpei declared a state of emergency in January 2024 and put in place water use restrictions. On 12 March, the FSM President issued a national state of emergency.



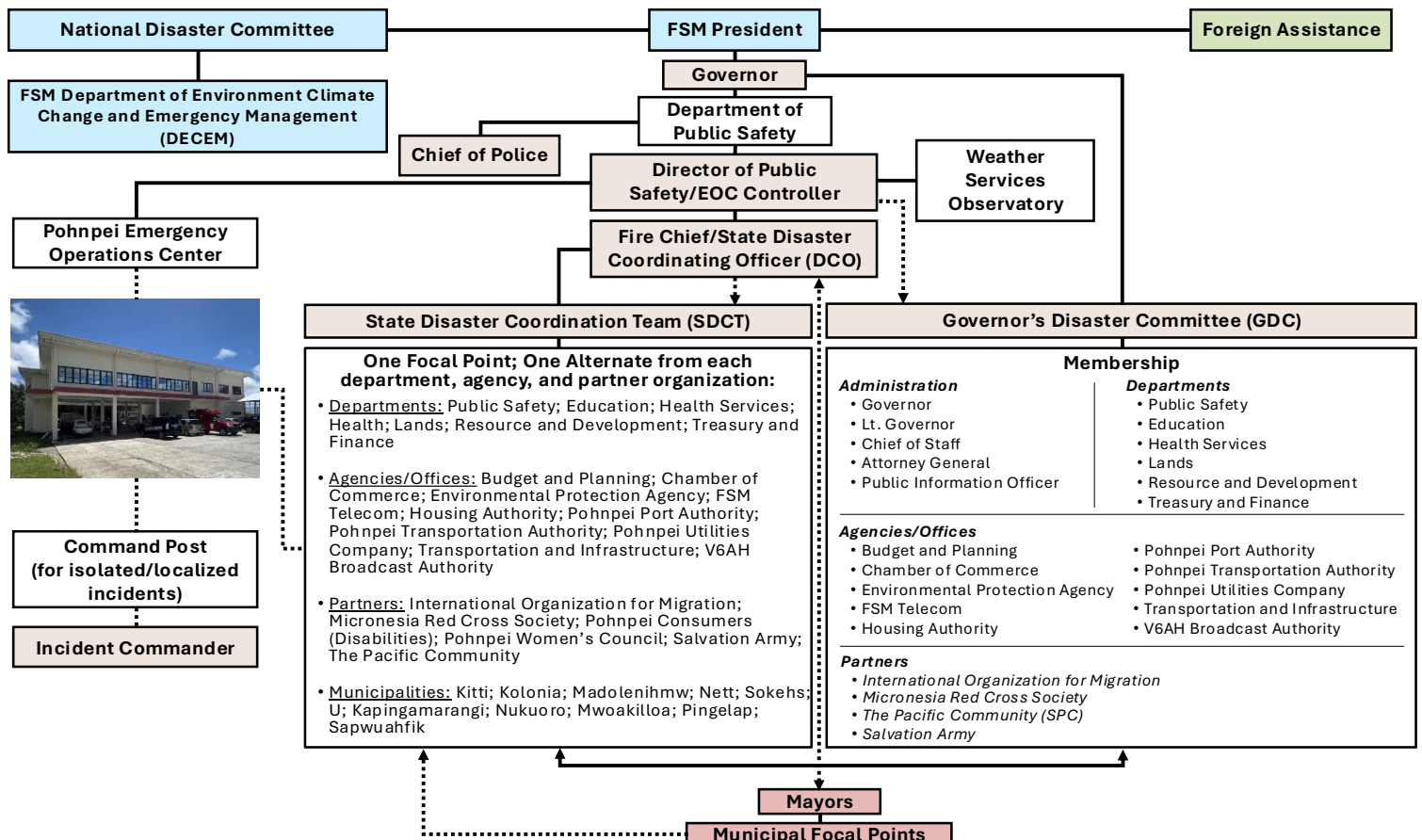
Disaster management in Pohnpei is coordinated in alignment with national frameworks, but primary response authority resides at the state level under the Governor. In emergencies, the State Emergency Operations Center (EOC), managed by the Department of Public Safety, serves as the central hub for operations. Policy direction is provided by the Governor and the Governor's Disaster Committee (GDC), while the State Disaster Coordinating Officer (DCO) and the State Disaster Coordination Team (SDCT) oversee operational response and inter-agency coordination.

Key documents include:

- Pohnpei State Disaster Preparedness Plan (2002)
- Pohnpei State Standard Operating Procedure for Emergency and Disaster Response (2017)
- Pohnpei Joint State Action Plan for Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change (2017)

These plans define roles, coordination mechanisms, and procedures for response, preparedness, and recovery.

- **Governor** – Provides direction on actions to be taken during disasters. Activates the EOC, GDC, and SDCT. Declares a State of Emergency on the advice of the GDC. Provides updates to the FSM President and requests national assistance, if needed.
- **Governor's Disaster Committee** – Department Directors responsible for directing the overall preparedness program, making emergency policy, and keeping the public and emergency office informed. Advises the Governor on allocating funds and utilizing state resources.
- **Director of Public Safety (EOC Controller)** – Oversees and coordinates all emergency response operations. Secretary for the GDC. Brings DCO and SDCT decisions and planning to the GDC. Oversees evacuation operations and emergency rescue activities. Coordinates national assistance and foreign assistance with the Governor, DCO, and national authorities.
- **State Disaster Coordination Team** – Assists the DCO in planning and implementing state disaster response activities. Comprised of one focal point and one alternate from each Pohnpei State disaster response-related department, agency, and partner organization, including the International Organization for Migration, Micronesia Red Cross Society, the Pacific Community, and the Salvation Army.
- **State Disaster Coordinating Officer** – Coordinates execution of actions authorized or assigned to departments or agencies by the Governor. Chairs the SDCT. Oversees evacuation operations in coordination with Mayors.
- **State Emergency Operations Center** – Coordinates response activities from its location in the Fire Station. Directs and controls local operating forces. For isolated and localized incidents, a Command Post may be set up.
- **Public Information Officer** – Conducts hazard awareness and public education programs. Arranges for media representatives to receive briefings during emergency situations.
- **Mayors** – Make emergency preparations and notify community of updated warning messages and evacuation plans. Designate municipal focal points as representatives in the SDCT. Conduct Initial Damage Assessments and report information to the EOC.



INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE REQUESTS

Pohnpei cannot independently request international assistance. When a disaster exceeds state response capacity, the Governor of Pohnpei declares a State of Emergency and requests support from the FSM National Government. If the event exceeds national capacity, the President formally requests international assistance, which may include support from the United States under the Compact of Free Association (COFA), as well as assistance from United Nations entities, regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, and foreign governments. The FSM National Government coordinates incoming support, whether from bilateral partners or multilateral mechanisms.

Responders may include:

- The United States and other bilateral partners
- United Nations entities
- The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement
- Non-government and non-profit groups – e.g., the Salvation Army

U.S. ASSISTANCE

Due to Pohnpei's dispersed outer islands and limited transport and logistics capacity, international assistance – particularly U.S. support – may be necessary to conduct damage assessments, deliver supplies, restore communications, and sustain response operations in remote atolls. Under the COFA, the United States plays a key role in disaster response in FSM. U.S. assistance may include funding from the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), technical assessment teams, supplies, and air or sea lift support, coordinated through the U.S. Department of State in consultation with FSM authorities.

The Disaster Assistance Emergency Fund (DAEF) is a joint U.S./FSM fund established under the COFA. Each year, the U.S. Government contributes US\$200,000 and FSM matches the contribution. The Fund is reserved for disaster situations. It may be accessed to account for all response-related expenditures for a nationally declared State of Emergency. The FSM President approves withdrawals from the DAEF up to US\$50,000. For withdrawals greater than US\$50,000, the U.S. Chief of Mission must concur with the withdrawal.

The Department of State is the lead federal agency (LFA) for U.S. Government (USG) foreign disaster response. Other federal agencies may contribute resources following a U.S. Presidential Disaster Declaration (PDD). A U.S. President will decide on a PDD after: the FSM President declares a national state of emergency/disaster; FSM utilizes its own resources including DAEF; FSM requests international assistance; the U.S. Chief of Mission declares a disaster; assessment findings lead the FSM President to determine that supplemental assistance is needed; and the FSM President makes an official request for a PDD.

2018 Tropical Depression Jelawat

In mid-March 2018, Tropical Depression Jelawat passed over Pohnpei State, leading to 48 continuous hours of rainfall that resulted in flooding, landslides, damage to critical infrastructure, and one death. The Governor declared a state of emergency and FSM President issued a presidential declaration of emergency, authorizing the release of US\$50,000 from DAEF.

U.S. Assistance

- On 6 May, the U.S. Ambassador declared a disaster due to flood and infrastructure damage. This declaration allowed USG agencies to conduct an assessment of the affected area.
- On 20 July, the U.S. President issued a Presidential Disaster Declaration under the COFA, releasing federal funding of USG emergency supplies and reconstruction assistance. Nearly US\$5 million in disaster assistance and reconstruction programs were implemented by USG partners.



Landslide in Pohnpei after Heavy Rains. Source: WSO Pohnpei

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