

Palau is exposed to drought, flooding, and tropical cyclones. More than 90% of its people live in coastal areas where high winds, heavy rains, and storm surges are prevalent hazards. The national disaster management (DM) structure is led by the central government, and the National Emergency Management Office (NEMO) is responsible for coordinating all DM activity across preparedness, response, and recovery. State and local authorities are first responders and can seek support – resources, coordination, etc. – from NEMO. Nationally, human and financial resources for preparedness and response are limited, and major losses – storm damage to infrastructure or drought-induced crop loss – require the country to seek and then manage flows of international aid funding and relief supplies.

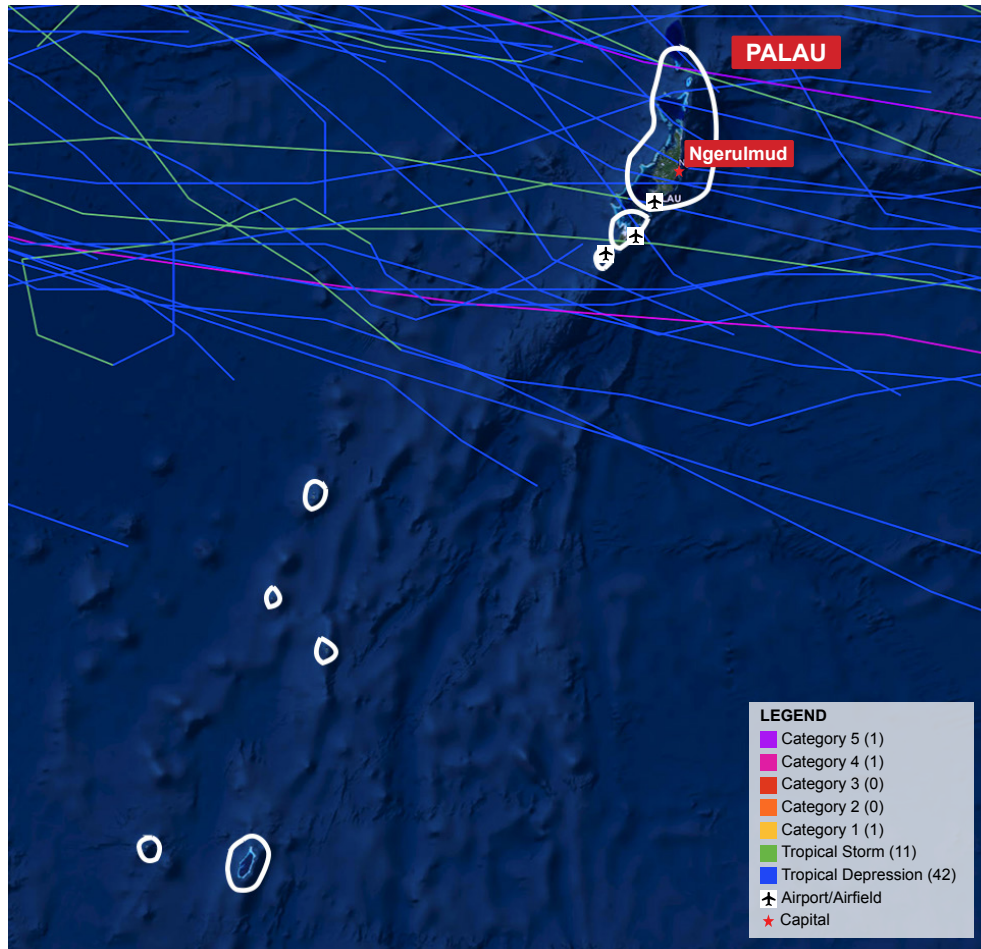


Figure 1: Tropical Cyclone Tracks in/around Palau (2000-2025); Source: NOAA

- Typhoons - the larger categories of tropical cyclones - have been the most destructive hazard events so far this century; all islands and communities are exposed to high winds, heavy rains, and storm surges.
- National agencies lead DM but rely on states, communities, and civil society to participate in hazard identification, risk mitigation, and immediate response.
- Remote islands and communities can be cut off from disaster relief; sea-based evacuations or delivery of relief supplies is the norm.
- Resource constraints mean Palau relies heavily on regional and international partners, including the U.S.

Facts about Palau

The Republic of Palau is an archipelago in the western Pacific Ocean.



Capital: Ngerulmud



Total Population: 17,600 (2020* census)

*2020 was the last national census conducted in Palau



Total Land Area: 488 square kilometers (188 square miles); 340 islands



Government: National: 3 branches – executive, legislative, judicial; Local: 16 states – executive (governor) and legislative branches



Traditional Government: Council of Chiefs, comprising the highest chief from each state, advises the national executive (President)



Languages: Palauan and English



Airports/Airfields:

- Roman Tmetuchi International Airport
Runway 05/27: 2,194 x 45 meters (7,198 x 147 feet)
- Peleliu Airfield
Runway 04/22: 1,829 x 12 meters (6,000 x 40 feet)
- Angaur Airfield
Runway 05/23: 2,134 x 46 meters (7,000 x 150 feet)



POPULATION COUNT



Palau commonly experiences tropical storms, but it is also exposed to coastal flooding and erosion, disease outbreaks, and drought. Anthropogenic hazards remain a concern.



Tropical Storms / Typhoons

- **Exposure:** Palau lies just south of the Pacific Ocean's main typhoon belt but experiences regular brushes by major storms
- **Vulnerability:** Coastal structures, infrastructure, and agricultural land have no protection from storm surge and saltwater intrusion
- **Impacts:** Loss of property and livelihoods; disruptions to transport, communications, health, and education systems



Coastal Flooding

- **Exposure:** Coastal lowlands commonly experience storm surges and high tides
- **Vulnerability:** 93% of homes, infrastructure, and agricultural land are in coastal areas with no ability to move inland due to inhospitable highlands
- **Impacts:** Frequent damage to homes and crops erodes coping capacity; saltwater intrusion and coastal erosion reduce available habitable and arable land and lead to food insecurity



Disease Outbreaks

- **Exposure:** Viral (e.g., hand, foot, and mouth) and vector-borne (e.g., dengue) diseases thrive in Palau's tropical climate and dense, coastal communities
- **Vulnerability:** Elders and children are physiologically more vulnerable, but anyone without access to clean water and hygiene facilities is at increased risk of infection
- **Impacts:** Loss of lives or productivity due to illness; strains on the limited health system



Drought

- **Exposure:** Rainfall varies widely year-on-year; January-March is the dry season
- **Vulnerability:** Remote communities at risk due to reliance on rain catchment for fresh water amid rising demand for water
- **Impacts:** Health effects of food and water shortages reduce labor productivity and disrupt public services; livelihoods disruption or destruction increases out-migration



Technical / Anthropogenic Hazards

- **Exposure:** Oil or hazardous materials may leak or spill from ships and air traffic; technical or human fault may contaminate water; built-up areas prone to structural collapses and fires
- **Vulnerability:** Effects of accidents, pollution, or fires affect a high proportion of people and assets, as they concentrate in densely populated areas of Koror
- **Impacts:** Health impacts of water contamination or shortage; ecosystem damage; loss of livelihoods



An examination of the major disasters that have struck Palau in the past 15 years offers some idea of the country's coping capacity and potential future needs.



December 2012: Typhoon Bopha, a Category 5 storm, passed south of Angaur

- Winds reached 250 kilometers per hour (155 miles per hour), and storm surge affected all islands, especially the east coasts of Babeldaob, Peleliu, and Angaur
- Some 1,250 people were directly affected
- More than 100 houses were destroyed and another 136 were damaged
- Crops were damaged and electricity, water, and communications were disrupted
- Government and Palau Red Cross operated 45 shelters, and responders distributed food, water, and supplies
- Total: US\$15-20 million in damage



November 2013: Typhoon Haiyan, a Category 5 storm, passed directly over Kayangel state

- Heavy rain, high winds, and storm surge caused US\$9.7 million in damage
- On Kayangel, 22 homes, most crops, and all infrastructure were destroyed; all residents (approximately 80 people) were displaced to Koror
- Across Babeldaob, nearly 400 homes and education, utilities, health, and agricultural facilities were damaged
- Government and Palau Red Cross activated emergency operations centers, and a State of Emergency was declared
- Responders delivered food and relief supplies



2015-2016: Drought affected some 14,200 people

- Koror recorded the lowest rainfall totals in 65 years, and its only dammed reservoir dried up
- Water shortages, poor sanitation, wildfire outbreaks, and crop failures impacted 80% of the population
- Total: US\$3.2 million in damage



2018-2019: A dengue outbreak ran from December 2018 through September 2019

- 600 cases were confirmed in Babeldaob and Peleliu
- Two deaths were attributed to the disease
- Ministry of Health led emergency public health information, surveillance, and vector control activities



April 2021: Typhoon Surigae passed to the country's north

- Heavy rain, sustained winds up to 136 kilometers per hour (85 miles per hour), and storm surges topping 23 meters (75 feet) caused US\$4.8 million in damage
- Some 300 people evacuated to 20 shelters
- Government and Palau Red Cross opened their operations centers
- The Red Cross Disaster Action Teams (RDAT) mobilized to identify households most at-risk and to help them evacuate
- Across Babeldaob and Peleliu, 7,300 people were affected, and 1,500 houses as well as water and power infrastructure were damaged

The DM system is centered on NEMO as the coordinator of response planning and execution. The response model is an incident command system with emergency functions assigned to offices and agencies per their areas of expertise. NEMO undertakes coordination of preparedness activities to ensure that all government departments and agencies, non-government organizations, churches, businesses, community groups, and regional partners know their roles during an emergency.

Disaster Executive Council (DEC) – chaired by the President; comprises all cabinet ministers; provides strategic oversight and guidance during a response; requests international assistance

National Emergency Committee (NEC) – implements National Disaster Risk Management Framework (NDRMF); oversees management and coordination; operates the National Emergency Operations Center (NEOC); issues early warnings; determines priority of communities to receive relief; coordinates external assistance; comprises:

- **National Emergency Management Office (NEMO)** – DEC and NEC Secretariat; houses the NEOC; coordinates and implements preparedness, response, and relief
- **Central Control Group (CCG)** – selected as needed by NEMO Coordinator; activates department and agency plans; liaises with all stakeholders; activates assessment system; deploys technical teams; coordinates media releases; identifies and coordinates international relief
- **National Disaster Coordinator (NDC)** – NEMO Coordinator; assumes control and coordination responsibilities during any declared national disaster; selects membership of the CCG to meet the needs of the scope, scale, and type of emergency

Incident Command Post (ICP) – on-site office for managing emergency response operations

Palau Red Cross Society – represented on the NEC; RDATs present in all 16 states; operates a separate emergency operations center for Red Cross work; coordinates with NEMO / NEOC during response operations; supporting agency for relief management and damage assessments, health and sanitation, communications, and shelter management

Civil Society – key local actors and donors – e.g., Belau Association of Non-governmental Organizations (BANGO), Rotary Club

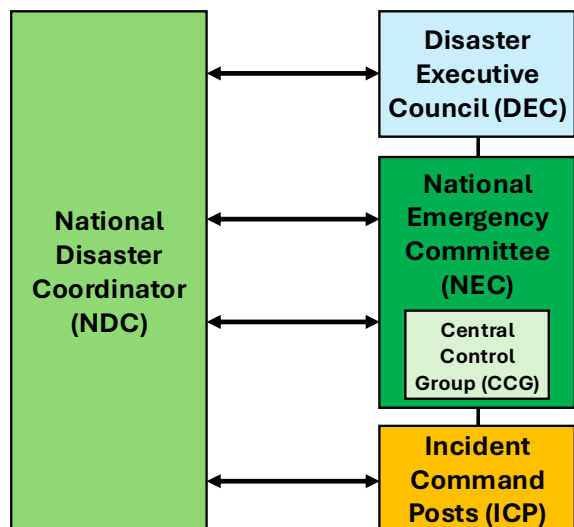


Figure 2: Structure for DM

National Disaster Risk Management Framework

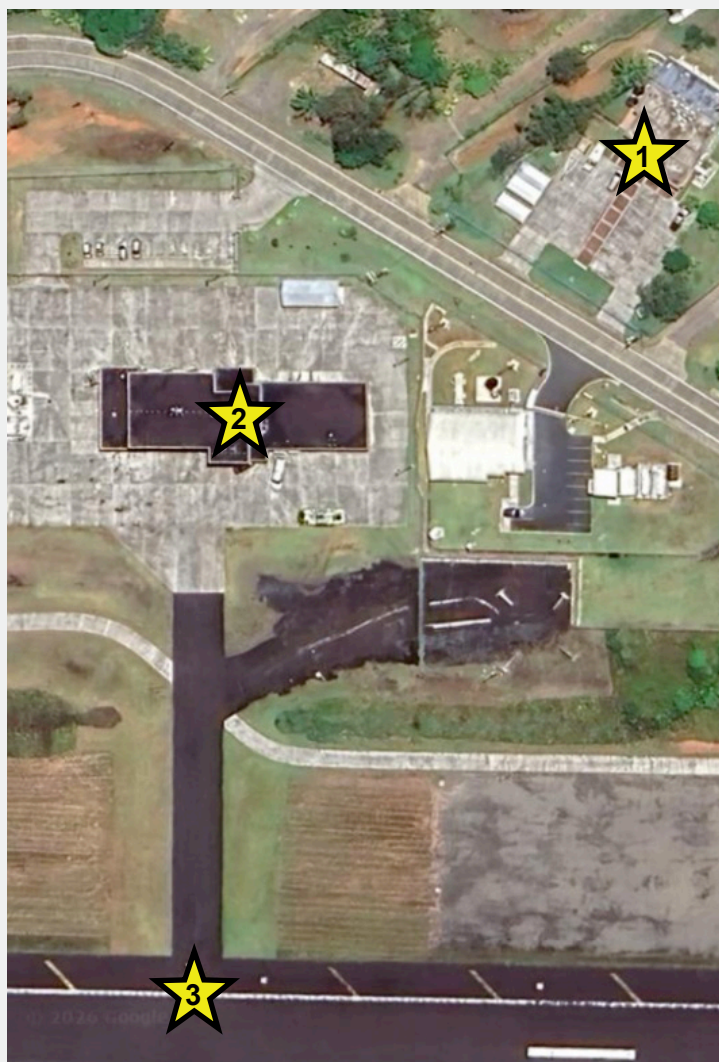
The NDRMF (2010, amended 2016) outlines institutional arrangements for coordination across preparedness, response, and recovery. It describes the DM system, integrates standard operating procedures for the NEOC, and provides DM arrangements down to the state level.

NEOC - as illustrated in the map below

Primary: NEMO Headquarters (1)

Secondary: Fire Operations Center (2)

- Located near Roman Tmetuchi International Airport (3)
- Standard Operating Procedures and National Incident Command System support state-level ICPs
- Staffed from within NEMO and the CCG



Original imagery: Google Earth

INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE REQUESTS

If a disaster response requires resources beyond those available domestically, the country may request international assistance. The NEC advises the DEC if international support is required, and the DEC approves an appeal. The President or designated cabinet official addresses the appeal for assistance to in-country embassies and diplomatic missions or directly to foreign governments. International responders are expected to abide by the structures and systems laid out in the NDRMF.

International Partners

- United Nations (UN) entities – Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), UN Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organization (WHO)
- Regional organizations – Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)
- International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement
- Technical agencies for early warning – Japan Meteorological Agency, Joint Typhoon Warning Center, Pacific Tsunami Warning Center, U.S. National Weather Service (Guam Weather Forecasting Office and Palau Weather Service Office)
- Key bilateral partners – Australia, Japan, Taiwan, U.S.

U.S. ASSISTANCE

Under the Compact of Free Association (COFA) between Palau and the U.S., Palau relies on the U.S. for military assets and personnel, and the U.S. has authority and responsibility for security and defense matters in or relating to Palau.

Since the COFA came into effect in the 1990s, U.S. military forces have continued to operate in and around Palau, including for non-traditional security activities – e.g., disaster management. Civil Action Teams from the U.S. armed services participate in preparedness and response actions related to logistics – planning, infrastructure, and services – and are present for public health outreach. In the wake of disasters, U.S. uniformed services, often under US PACOM, may be tasked to support the civilian response. In 2021, after Typhoon Surigae struck Palau, the U.S. Coast Guard Sector Guam delivered supplies to Kayangel.

Under the 2024 Federal Programs and Services Agreement between the U.S. and Palau, the U.S. National Weather Service (NWS) provides meteorological services, weather forecasting, and severe weather warnings to Palau. The NWS' Weather Forecast Office Guam supports the Palau Weather Service Office in Koror. Moreover, the NWS' Pacific Region administers the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center, which provides tsunami alerts and information to Palau.



Typhoon Surigae Response (2021)

The NEC coordinated public warnings and information, and it provided the central structure to support states. Because telephone communications were disrupted, NEMO and the NEOC had to shift from their primary location to two locations – the President's office and the Weather Services Office. The Palau Red Cross emergency operations center became a key communications hub, and radios and runners linked response coordination offices.

NEMO was joined by IOM to source and deliver essential household items, and gaps in supplies were filled by Palau Red Cross, with support from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and Australian government. Airlift assistance came from the World Food Programme's Pacific Humanitarian Air Service. The U.S. government delivered financial assistance and airlifted shelter materials and other supplies to the country for onward distribution by IOM. The Japanese government also provided relief supplies through its international cooperation agency.

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