

**ISLAND SECURITY POLICY INSTITUTE**

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**POLICY BRIEF**

# When 90 Percent Arrives by Ship

## *Supply Chain Security and the Island Community Vulnerability That Policy Has Not Addressed*

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## Supply Chain Security, Emergency Preparedness, and the Island

### **Community Vulnerability That Policy Has Not Addressed**

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disruption Pacific Islands, Hawaii emergency food supply, island logistics security, critical supply chain Pacific, maritime security Hawaii, food security island communities, supply chain emergency preparedness Pacific the State of Hawaii. This publication represents ISPI's independent research and policy analysis. The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position of any funder, sponsor, or affiliated organization. ISPI maintains full editorial independence on all research outputs. Full institutional credential documentation is available to qualified government agencies, foundations, and institutional partners upon formal request. In September 2018, a fire at Honolulu's Sand Island container terminal disrupted port operations for three days. Three days is a manageable supply disruption in continental terms — most businesses have sufficient inventory to absorb a 72-hour supply gap without operational consequences. In Hawaii, three days of port disruption in 2018 produced measurable retail shortages in perishable food categories, temporary price spikes in essential goods, and a visible public anxiety response that three days of supply disruption would not produce in a continental community with alternative supply routes. The 2018 event was minor — a contained fire, a three-day disruption, no major emergency. It illustrates, nonetheless, the fundamental vulnerability that makes supply chain security a different category of public safety concern in island communities than it is in continental communities. The port is not one of Hawaii's supply chains. It is Hawaii's supply chain. When it stops, everything stops simultaneously — and there is no alternative.

### **Key Findings**

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Hawaii imports approximately 85 to 90 percent of its food by maritime shipping. U.S. Pacific territories import virtually all pharmaceutical supplies, medical equipment, construction materials, and fuel through port infrastructure with no alternative delivery mechanism. A single port disruption creates a simultaneous failure across all supply categories with no continental equivalent. Current federal emergency preparedness guidance recommends individuals maintain 72-hour emergency food supplies. ISPI's analysis of documented supply disruption durations in Hawaii and Pacific Island emergency events indicates that this guidance is inadequate for island emergency contexts, where supply disruptions routinely extend beyond 72 hours and can extend to weeks in major emergencies. Port security frameworks designed for high-volume continental entry points — including CBP port security programs and DHS port resilience initiatives — are not calibrated for island port contexts where the same infrastructure simultaneously serves as the sole supply delivery mechanism and the primary emergency resource entry point. Climate change is increasing the

frequency and intensity of weather events that disrupt island supply chains, making supply chain security an escalating emergency preparedness priority that current island emergency policy frameworks treat as a secondary consideration.

## The Singularity Problem

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The concept of supply chain resilience in continental policy contexts assumes the availability of alternative supply routes when a primary route fails. This assumption is so fundamental to continental supply chain risk management that it is rarely stated explicitly — it is a background condition that policy planners do not need to specify because it is structurally guaranteed by continental geography. Island supply chains do not have this structural guarantee. The policy implication is not that island supply chains need better resilience in the conventional sense — more redundancy, more alternative routes, better logistics optimization. The policy implication is that island communities must maintain supply reserves adequate to sustain the community through the period between the failure of the primary supply route and the restoration of supply delivery — a period that, in major island emergencies, has historically extended from days to weeks.

## Policy Recommendations

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1. Mandate state-level pre-positioned food, pharmaceutical, and fuel reserves for Hawaii and U.S. Pacific territories at levels adequate for a minimum 30-day supply disruption — calibrated to actual documented supply disruption durations in island emergency events, not to continental 72-hour emergency planning assumptions.
2. Develop island-specific port security frameworks that address the dual role of island ports as both critical economic infrastructure and the sole emergency resource delivery mechanism — requiring port security planning to integrate emergency supply delivery continuity as a primary objective alongside security objectives.
3. Commission comprehensive supply chain security policy framework development for island communities through ISPI and similar institutions, integrating port security, emergency preparedness, and food system resilience in a unified policy architecture that treats supply chain singularity as the fundamental design constraint.
4. Establish federal funding mechanisms specifically for island supply chain resilience infrastructure — pre-positioned community supply reserves, port emergency continuity infrastructure, and alternative supply delivery

planning — that reflect the unique vulnerability of non-contiguous, geographically isolated communities rather than applying continental infrastructure funding formulas. The Island Security Policy Institute (ISPI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization based in Honolulu, Hawaii. ISPI produces practitioner-led research, policy analysis, training programs, and commissioned research on public safety, emergency preparedness, insider threat, and security policy for island and coastal communities worldwide. ISPI's research draws on verified operational experience across U.S. military service, metropolitan law enforcement, diplomatic security operations, FEMA-certified emergency management, and campus safety administration. ISPI is registered as a federal contractor on SAM.gov under NAICS 541720. To commission research, subscribe to ISPI publications, request the ISPI Policy Advisor institutional access, or inquire about training programs and speaking engagements: purposes with full attribution to the Island Security Policy Institute. For commercial reproduction or translation rights, contact [ISPIGlobal@proton.me](mailto:ISPIGlobal@proton.me).

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