



The Eruption of Mount Dukono on Halmahera Island, Indonesia

Mount Dukono erupted in North Halmahera District, North Maluku Province on May 8, 2026

Indonesia is one of the world's most volcanically active countries, with 55 volcanoes erupting since the 1960s, which is the highest number globally. Among them, Mount Dukono on Halmahera Island is especially notable because it has been erupting almost continuously since 1933, producing frequent ash emissions and volcanic explosions. Mount Dukono has its high at 1,087 meters above sea level and located about 14 kilometers from the city of Tobelo. Since January 2026, it has erupted 117 times, reflecting its persistent volcanic activity. According to the Geological Agency, the eruptions are related to tectonic movements beneath Halmahera Island, particularly the interaction of the Maluku Sea Plate and the Pacific Plate through a double subduction process.

Moreover, Mount Dukono continued its frequent eruptive activity on December 12, 2026. According to the Mount Dukono Volcano Observatory, the volcano erupted three times on the morning of May 8, 2026. It sent volcanic ash up to 2,000 meters above the crater, with ash columns of approximately ranging from 400 to 1,500 meters. The ash plumes drifted toward the northwest.

Damage and losses

Impact on the affected area

The eruption of Mount Dukono on May 8, 2026, likely had significant impacts on agriculture in the surrounding areas of North Halmahera District, although no official reports have yet quantified the losses. Volcanic ashfall disrupted public activities and transportation and may have affected nearby farms and agricultural production. Since many communities around Mount Dukono rely heavily on agriculture for their livelihoods, the eruption created concerns about damage to crops and reduced productivity.

Volcanic ash can spread over large areas, reaching tens of kilometers from the eruption site and covering farmland with layers of fine ash. This ash can block sunlight, hinder photosynthesis, and contaminate water sources used for irrigation. In the short term, crops may suffer reduced growth, lower yields, or even complete failure if the ashfall is heavy.

Furthermore, volcanic ash contains various chemical compounds that can alter soil conditions and potentially harm plants. Although volcanic materials can improve soil fertility over long periods, fresh ash deposits can initially reduce soil quality and create unfavorable conditions for farming. As a result, repeated ashfall from Mount Dukono poses an ongoing threat to agricultural activities and the economic well-being of farming communities in North Halmahera.

Additionally, the eruption of Mount Dukono had devastating consequences for hikers in the area, resulting in the deaths of two Singaporeans and one Indonesian. The victims were struck by volcanic ash and debris near the summit, while the remaining hikers were evacuated safely. The incident also highlighted the dangers of recreational activities around active volcanoes and disrupted tourism activities in North Maluku.

Agricultural devastation

Agricultural land: No official reports have yet quantified the damage on agricultural crops.

Affected crops: No official reports have yet quantified the damage on agricultural crops.

Government responses and countermeasures

In response to the ongoing eruptions, Indonesian authorities maintained the volcano at an alert status and implemented several safety measures. The Geological Agency advised residents and tourists to avoid all activities within a four-kilometer radius of crater. Authorities emphasized that the direction of volcanic ashfall can change depending on wind speed and direction, making the affected areas unpredictable.

The government also urged communities living around Mount Dukono to keep masks or face coverings readily available to protect themselves from volcanic ash exposure. Continuous monitoring by the Volcano Observatory and regular reports to the Geological Agency have been essential in providing early warnings and reducing risks to residents and visitors near the volcano.

In addition, on response to the tragedy, Indonesian authorities mobilised more than 150 personnel for a two-day rescue operation. The local government permanently closed all access points to Mount Dukono, prohibited the issuance of climbing permits, and enforced a no-entry zone within a four-kilometer radius of the crater. Travel agencies were instructed to inform potential climbers about the restrictions, and legal action was threatened against anyone violating the safety measures.

Sources:

1. Agricultural Office in North Maluku Province, Indonesia
2. National Board for Disaster Management (BNPB), Indonesia
3. Directorate of Food Crop Protection (Ministry of Agriculture, Indonesia)
4. NASA Earth Observatory (2026, May 27) Ever Restless Mount Dukono Erupts.
5. The Straits Times (2026, May 11) Expedition to Mount Dukono that left three hikers dead was advertised as beginner-friendly.
6. Tempo English (2026, May 12) Mount Dukono Erupts Three Times This Morning, Residents Warned.
7. Tempo English (2024, December 30) The Impact of Indonesia's Mount Dukono Eruption in North Halmahera.