

DISASTERS

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION IN THE AMERICAS



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Crisis Management on the Internet: A Snapshot of Progress in the Region

Health crises come in many shapes and sizes... a bus veers off the road and crashes in a rural area with only one hospital; a major earthquake strikes a large metropolitan area; a disease breaks out and epidemiologists must forewarn an at-risk population of the causes and impacts... To be effective in any crisis situation, our communications strategies must be reliable and innovative. We need to develop and promote existing communication mechanisms as means of obtaining assistance and accessing necessary resources in a crisis. Telecommunications technologies in particular, are increasingly powerful tools whose applications and benefits are only beginning to be realized in international disaster work.

Improving Disaster Communications

In November, 1997, an international meeting took place in Santa Fe de Bogota, Colombia called Health Crisis and the Internet: Harnessing the Internet for Disasters and Epidemics. This event convened emergency and disaster professionals from around the world, as well as a large number of representatives from NGOs, the telecommunications industry, the mass media and the private sector. Marking the two-year point in a series of communications-improving projects both within and between countries, the meeting provided a

snapshot of the progress made by Latin America and the Caribbean in Internet usage for crisis management. Participants were able to share novel ways in which the Internet is being used to manage crises; to exchange information with colleagues sharing similar vulnerabilities and finally, to return to their countries armed with recommendations for expanding access to the Internet and using new technology to solve decades-old problems.

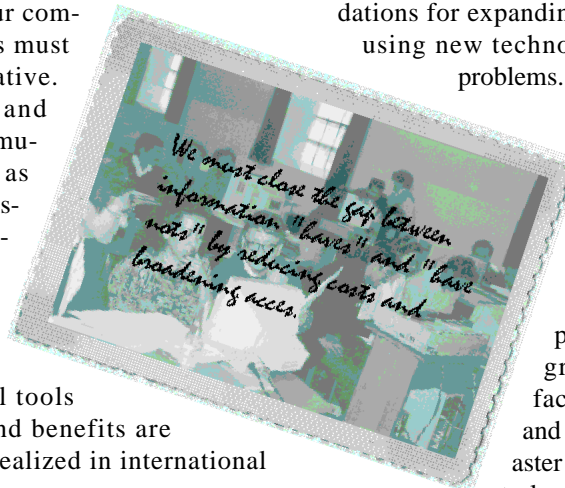
More than just a meeting...

Over 350 participants from 42 countries took part in this multidimensional gathering which featured: plenary presentations; work groups addressing problems faced by average users, policy and coordination matters and disaster reduction and epidemic control; exhibits by organizations who make maximum use of the

Internet; the Cybercafe offering computers with full Internet access so that participants could browse the Web, send e-mail, or simply converse with others about practical uses of this medium. The Cybercafe, and a similar site at the Colombian Ministry of Health were also used following the meeting for hands-on training courses.

At the outset, participants expressed concern over several issues impacting their ability to use the Internet as a tool for improving crisis manage-

(cont. on pg. 7)



INSIDE

News from PAHO/WHO	2
Other Organizations	3
Member Countries	4
Review of Publications	6
Upcoming Meetings	6
Selected Bibliography	8

News from PAHO/WHO

New Management Information Network

The new WHO Collaborating Center, the Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance in Hawaii has created the Pacific Disaster Management Information Network on the World Wide Web. This site provides an online library of links to disaster management information, publications and electronic journals; technology for disaster management personnel; and online educational and training materials and courses. The Center was created in 1994 to provide and facilitate education, training and research in civil-military operations, particularly those requiring international disaster management and humanitarian assistance. The web site is located at <http://coe.tamc.amedd.army.mil/> □

PAHO Directing Council Passes Resolution on El Niño

The El Niño phenomenon is no stranger to the Region. Many Latin American countries remember vividly the last major El Niño in 1982-83. Concerned that the new manifestation of El Niño may be even worse, and aware that the damages caused by this phenomenon affect several countries simultaneously without respecting borders, PAHO's Member Countries passed a resolution at

its 1997 Directing Council Meeting. The resolution calls on countries and PAHO to:

- Develop intersectoral coordination mechanisms and mutual cooperation among countries in the spirit of regional integration.
- Strengthen systems for early warning and epidemiological surveillance and disease control, and disseminate this information freely through the Internet.
- Ensure that technical cooperation priorities focus on assessing epidemiological risk; coordinating the preparation of contingency plans; exchanging information for decision making and public awareness; and training for health personnel.

PAHO's Subcommittee on Planning and Programming is considering including disaster mitigation in health facilities on the agenda of this year's Pan American Sanitary Conference, thus keeping these important topics visible in the collective concerns of the Member Countries. The Subcommittee will consider a specially prepared technical document that outlines the current situation of regional advances made in disaster mitigation, the reasons for a lack of advance in some areas and a proposal for improving the situation. □

SUMA Steering Committee Meets in Geneva

The second meeting of the SUMA Steering Committee took place in Geneva in December. With the focus on the globalization of SUMA—a computerized tool for managing incoming humanitarian supplies—representatives of donor agencies, and other UN Organizations and WHO Regional Offices joined Committee members from Latin America and the Caribbean. A SUMA progress report of Phase I, which concluded in 1997, was presented as well as a proposed work plan for 1998 and beyond that included awareness-raising workshops for staff and key nationals in other WHO regions. Membership in the Steering Committee will be reviewed to include representatives from other regions interested in adopting SUMA, thereby reflecting the increasingly global nature of this project. To date, more than 1,600 people have been trained in Latin America and the Caribbean to sort, classify and inventory humanitarian supplies using SUMA. □

In the Works . . .

One-stop Shopping for Disaster Information



Are we suffering from information overload? Many would agree that this is the case, although few would be willing to sacrifice the chance to access the wide range of disaster management information now available from multiple sources. PAHO is presently exploring a way to help to manage this growing collection of information by creating a multi-agency disaster information Web site that would provide access to electronic information and publications from the many sectors involved in disaster management in the Americas. This collectively-owned Web site, with high-speed access can act as a mirror site for many organizations, thus allowing them to expand the number of users their information reaches. It will also help to fill in gaps in existing information. Users would also benefit from an overall picture of what is available, helping them to use this information more efficiently. Presently in the design phase, more information on this one-stop site for disaster management information will be available in the next issue of this newsletter. □

Other Organizations

MCDU Focuses on Latin America and the Caribbean

The UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) recently convened a meeting of the UN Military and Civil Defense Unit (MCDU) in Geneva to discuss collaboration between civilian and military resources in Latin America and the Caribbean. The MCDU is the focal point of access for governments, regional organizations, military and civil defense institutions interested in supporting humanitarian agencies. Discussions focused on the Tradewinds and FAHUM exercises. Tradewinds is an annual exercise that takes place in the Caribbean in preparation for civilian-military cooperation in the event of a disaster. FAHUM (armed forces in humanitarian activities), is a distinct type of disaster preparedness training being organized by the US Department of Defense (Southern Command) for early this February. The FAHUM exercise will take place in Guatemala with the participation of approximately 17 nationals from the Caribbean and the Central American nations.

While these exercises undoubtedly improve the readiness of foreign militaries to intervene in the aftermath of disasters, the effect on civilian preparedness remains to be evaluated. PAHO/WHO is proposing a regional meeting of disaster coordinators for mid-1998 to discuss methods for ensuring that objectives are met in the scenarios and organization of civilian-military exercises.

UCLA Public Health Curriculum

The Center for Public Health and Disaster Relief at the University of California at Los Angeles has created a curriculum for post-graduate students of public health, community professionals and future researchers. The curriculum examines how natural and manmade disasters relate to public health, thus providing the knowledge and skills to examine, plan for, and respond to future disasters. In addition, the Center plans to establish field internships with agencies concentrating on disaster planning, relief and recovery. Future plans include a certification program, fellowships distance learning and continuing education workshops. For more information contact Loc Nguyen, UCLA Center for Public Health and Disaster Relief, Box 951772, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1772, fax (310) 794-1805; e-mail locn@ucla.edu. □

ICAO Signs Memo of Understanding

The International Civil Aviation Organization, the Office for Latin America and the Caribbean of the International Council of Airports and PAHO/WHO have signed a memo of understanding to develop a joint program of activities that will promote the preparation, updating or adoption of emergency plans in airports. Each organization will provide technical advice and information in their particular area of expertise: ICAO in the integration of all civilian aviation authorities; ICA in promoting the participation of all airports in the Region; and PAHO in the coordination of health sector matters. They will also design tools to evaluate the plans. The current memo of understanding is valid for five years. □

NGO Network for Communications

VITA (Volunteers in Technical Assistance), is collaborating with the Dutch NGO Tool, to establish a network of international NGOs for priority use of VITAsat, VITA's low earth orbiting satellite system launched in September 1997. The new network is expected to: extend existing communications technologies, prioritize communications needs, help find funds for equipment for indigenous NGOs, be a source of advice and training, help establish local information centers and multi-disciplinary "knowledge networks". An organizing meeting, involving NGOs, communications experts and funding agencies is planned for the first quarter of 1998. Contact jsedlak@vita.org. □

AlertNet!

AlertNet, an online disaster resource center, was launched in the fall of '97 by the Reuter Foundation, to provide access to comprehensive and centralized information needed for planning and mobilizing relief efforts. AlertNet is located at <http://alertnet.org> and is provided free of charge to disaster relief organizations. The site is divided into a public and private zone. The private zone is available only to AlertNet members (individuals or organizations engaged in relief work). To become a member, visit the AlertNet site or contact the Reuter Foundation at (212) 603-3307. □

New and Updated Web Sites

Visit these new or updated disaster information web sites on the World Wide Web:

CEPRENAC:
www.sinfo.net/cepre-denac/

Costa Rica's National Emergency Commission:
www.cne.go.cr/

OSSO, the Southwest Seismological Observatory (Colombia):
osso.univalle.edu.co/

Dominican Republic's Civil Defense:
www.codetel.net.do/defensacivil/

COLCIENCIAS:
This Colombian organization's Latin American virtual conference coincided with Global Knowledge '97. Visit the website for news on this interesting experience.
www.colciencias.gov.co/cg97co



CRID

ns.netsalud.sa.cr/crid
Look under 'Other Sources of Information' for many new links.



Member Countries

First Session of International Hospital Mitigation Committee

A committee of international experts—physicians, engineers and architects—from Latin America and the Caribbean was created as a result of the recommendations made at the International Conference on Disaster Mitigation in Health Facilities (Mexico City 1996). The Committee is charged with advising PAHO/WHO on issues concerning the vulnerability of hospitals to disasters and with assisting member countries in establishing and monitoring national programs that reduce vulnerability in health facilities. At the first

meeting the Committee urged the creation of multidisciplinary groups of professionals to increase the effectiveness of disaster mitigation efforts in existing hospitals. The group stressed that the sustainability of disaster prevention and mitigation in hospitals is closely linked to the implementation of recommendations into national hospital accreditation programs and maintenance plans. Future work by this Committee will be directed by requests for technical assistance from the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. For more information, contact Ing. Claudio Osorio, PAHO/WHO Disaster Mitigation Officer, Apartado Postal 17-07-8982, Quito, Ecuador; fax: (593-2) 46-4630; e-mail: osoriocl@ecnet.ec □

EL NIÑO

Health Sector in Central America Discusses El Niño

On November 3-5, 1997 representatives of the ministries of health, water companies, national emergency committees, civil defense agencies, and universities of Central America met in San José, Costa Rica, together with representatives of OFDA, ECHO, the World Bank, the International Federation of the Red Cross, CEPREDENAC, and the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction to review the principle health problems that could arise as a result of disasters caused by El Niño.

Working groups focused on aspects of epidemiology, environmental sanitation, information dissemination, and cooperation policies to produce the conclusions and recommendations for implementation by countries in the sub-region. The use of the Internet as a means of sharing information and disseminating news about El Niño was also discussed. These documents are all available on the World Wide Web at <http://www.paho.org/english/disaster.htm> (click on "El Niño" on the home page) or in print form from PAHO at the address on page 8. □

El Niño in South America

The presence of the El Niño phenomenon in South America has put the subregion in a state of alert for several months now, recalling memories of the last El Niño occurrence in 1982-83.

El Niño's presence, however, is not restricted to the Andean region. Acute weather changes have also caused flooding and drought in areas of Mexico, Paraguay and Brazil.

In contrast to the 1983 El Niño, forecasters were able to issue an early warning approximately four months before it arrived. This alert period generated many expectations, questions and media attention to which only a few countries, such as Peru, have been able to respond. □

Water Supply Systems: Just as Vulnerable as Hospitals

Through the joint efforts of many experts in Latin America, a set of guidelines was established for assessing the vulnerability of water supply systems to natural disasters. This methodology was field tested in case studies, funded by the government of Germany, of recent disasters in Costa Rica, Montserrat, Brazil and Venezuela. Based on the observations and recommendations generated, PAHO's Center for Sanitary Engineering (CEPIS) in Lima, Peru is preparing the final version of Guidelines for Preparing a Vulnerability Analysis of Water and Sewerage Systems. The guidelines will be ready shortly in print and in electronic format. Look for them on the PAHO and CEPIS Web sites: www.paho.org/english/disaster.htm or www.cepis.org.pe or request more information from Ing. Claudio Osorio (address in the previous article) or Pan American Center for Sanitary Engineering, CEPIS, Calle Los Pinos 259, Urbanización Camacho, Lima 12, Perú; fax: (51-1) 437-8289; e-mail: cepis@cepis.org. □

New University Curriculum to Include Disasters

A meeting of Central American Deans and Professors of Medicine was held to review a curriculum proposal for the topic of disasters. Representatives from Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua were present. The group accepted, with few modifications,

a proposal set forth by the El Salvador representative. The proposal is now being reviewed by the national universities in the sub-region. Another outcome of this gathering was the creation of a Mesoamerican University Commission to discuss issues relating to the teaching of disaster preparedness. El Salvador will coordinate the Commission's activity during the first year. The group will follow up on recommendations made at an earlier meeting of the subregion's health disaster coordinators, particularly in countries at the initial stage of implementation. Belize, Mexico and Panama will be formally invited to join the Commission. For more information, contact Dr. Mauricio Ferrer, Director General COEN, Ministerio del Interior, Av. Juan Pablo II, San Salvador, El Salvador; e-mail: coenels@es.com.su.

On a related note, university professors from Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama attended the 2nd Central American Course on Natural Disasters, with Emphasis on Public Health, held in Costa Rica. During the three-week course, participants analyzed strategies for incorporating disaster preparedness and prevention studies into the university curriculum. A proposal was made for the creation of a Central American University Network in Disaster Teaching and Management as a follow up tool for these experiences. For more information, contact Dr. Mauricio Vargas, Director, School of Public Health, University of Costa Rica, San Jose, Costa Rica; fax: (506) 253-6436. □

Honduras: Foreign Affairs Training Completes Cycle

A two-day seminar/workshop coordinated by COPECO, the national Emergency Commission, CEPREDENAC and PAHO/WHO completed a cycle of training for Foreign Affairs and diplomatic personnel throughout Central America. This sector plays a key role in management decisions regarding post-disaster humanitarian assistance, and in addition to training in this area, the workshop served to cement relations between a wide variety of national institutions, cooperation agencies and the UN system. A Manual on Guidelines for Managing Humanitarian Aid following Disasters is in the final phase of preparation and should be available soon. Contact Cnel. Jose Santos Ortez, COPECO, Col. Kennedy,

Instalaciones IHMA, Tegucigalpa, Honduras; fax: (504) 304-492. □

Upcoming Meeting of Caribbean Disaster Coordinators

A meeting for all Health Disaster Coordinators in the Caribbean sub-region is being planned for March 26-27, 1998 in Curacao. The last major meeting was held in June 1994 in Jamaica. Health Disaster Coordinators will have an opportunity to make a presentation on national developments and activities since 1994 and on the status of disaster management and preparedness in his/her country. Other topics for discussion during the meeting are mass casualty management in the Caribbean countries, SUMA Version # 5.0, and a case study: The Plan for Management of Chemical Disasters in Barbados. This meeting will facilitate the networking of National Health Disaster Coordinators in the Caribbean by establishing links and fostering better understanding of the conditions in the countries of the sub-region. Further information on this meeting may be obtained by contacting Dr. Dana van Alphen, PAHO/WHO, P. O. Box 508, Bridgetown, Barbados; fax: (246) 436-6447; phone: (246) 426-4261; e-mail: dvanalphen@pahocpc.org □

Caribbean Mass Casualty Management Training Continues

The program for Mass Casualty Management Training in the Caribbean continues in Belize and Nevis. The Belize training program runs from February 23-March 3 and the Nevis program, March 23-29. The program aims to establish a standard Mass Casualty Management protocol specifically for the Caribbean countries (which share similar population and geographical characteristics, national infrastructure, limited resources, political structure and the potential for mass casualty events.) So far training programs have been conducted in Anguilla, Antigua, Barbados, the British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Maarten, St. Vincent, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad. Further information on this training program may be obtained by contacting Dr. Dana van Alphen at the address in the previous article. □



Review of Publications

Emergency Planning on the Internet by Rick Tobin and Ryan Tobin.

This is a compilation of emergency management sites available on the Internet that have been categorized and evaluated by the authors. Other features include a guide to using the Internet, practical exercises for the reader, and references to online newsletters and chat groups. (230pp. Available for US\$49 + \$6 S&H Domestic/\$15 shipping and handling international airmail, ISBN 0-86587-600-2, call Government Institutes at (301) 921-2355)

The Essential Internet: Basics for International NGOs by Carlos Parada with Gary Garriott and Janet Green.

A very user friendly introduction to the Internet and associated technologies (email, telnet, intranet). Also includes a chapter on Internet resources for NGOs and a chapter on telecommunications technology and disaster response. (US\$25+S&H. Contact InterAction, email: ia@interaction.org, fax: (202) 667-8236.)

Disaster Communications by Mark Wood and the Disaster Relief Communications Foundation (UK).

This book presents a practical guide to implementing basic communications facilities taking

into account diverse working environments and the need to put across technical solutions in straightforward language. Written for a global audience, it describes satellite systems, terrestrial radio systems, power supplies, legal issues, and local communications solutions in 216 pages. (Available online at <http://apointl.org/institute/pages/disaster.htm> or for US\$40 + shipping and handling from the APCO Institute, Fax: (904) 322-9766, email: institute@apointl.org.)

La Planificación: ¿Herramienta Preventiva en Desastres? (Planning: A Prevention Tool for Disasters?)

CEHAP has published this publication, in Spanish only, that contains the proceedings of a Latin American meeting on disaster prevention and planning that dealt with issues of vulnerability and risk. To order contact CEHAP, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Apartado Aéreo 1779, Medellín, Colombia, Fax: (954) 230-9630, email: cehap@perseus.unalmed.edu.co

Upcoming Meetings

IDRA Conference and Trade Show

The International Disaster Recovery Association, IDRA, has announced its 8th Annual Conference & Trade Show to be held March 15-18th in Boston, MA. Presentations and exhibits will focus on Contingency Planning, Business Continuation and Disaster Recovery using Telecommunications. Contact: Ben Tartaglia Fax:(508) 842-2585 or visit the IDRA website at www.idra.com. □

Disaster Forum '98

Disaster Forum '98 is an international conference organized by the combined efforts of several Canadian relief organizations, focusing on emergency preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation. It will be held in Edmonton, Canada from June 26th-July 1st, 1998. For more information visit the conference website at <http://www.freenet.edmonton.ab.ca/disaster> or email disaster@freenet.edmonton.ab.ca. □

The Internet and Crisis Management

(from pg. 1)

ment. The most significant obstacle impeding widespread Internet usage was the widening gap between those with unlimited access and those whose access to information and new technologies was restricted by economic, linguistic, cultural or administrative constraints.



- bring the issues from this meeting to your global meetings

To donor and financing agencies:

- consider the benefits of this approach
- make training and technical support integral parts of funded projects
- continue to support existing projects

Recommendations

The main issues brought up at the conference were reflected in the final recommendations and called for action from countries, industries and agencies...

To the high-level authorities:

- allow for free and unrestricted exchange of information, a cornerstone of integration and development
- keep the issues 'alive' by incorporating them into the agenda of regional meetings, both at the political and funding levels

To health authorities in Latin America and the Caribbean

- use the Internet to link all disaster and emergency coordinators
- post health crisis data on the Internet in a free and unrestricted manner
- publish information and literature in languages used in this region

To the telecommunications industry and ISP providers:

- help bring down costs to the health sector
- share knowledge and expertise

Looking Ahead

A global culture of disaster prevention must be supported by a global culture of information where health crisis managers have access to timely and quality information. Without direct communication between and among decision makers, and without a free flow of reliable information among all involved, effective contingency planning and emergency response are at risk. Communications networks using the Internet encourage and enable disaster managers to exchange information, ideas and experiences across institutional and geographical borders and empower them to improve the performance of their duties in disaster reduction

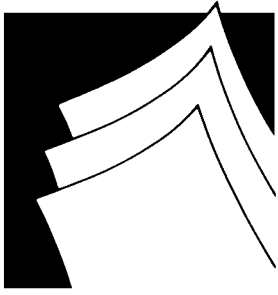


You Don't Know What You're Missing if we're missing your e-mail address!



Don't miss out on special news and updates which will only be circulated by e-mail. Take a moment to fill in the sheet enclosed with this newsletter and return it to us as soon as possible.

Can't find the sheet? Send an e-mail message to disaster@paho.org, giving us your e-mail address (be sure to include your name and address so we can cross-reference your record!)



Selected Bibliography

The articles listed in this section may be of interest to health professionals and others responsible for disaster preparedness, mitigation and relief. They have been reproduced and recently added to the collection of articles available from the Editor of this Newsletter. A complete list of reprints is available upon request. Please quote the reference code listed to the left of the publication title when requesting articles.

- U.10** Noji, Eric K. and Michael J. Toole, "The historical development of public health responses to disasters," *Disasters*, Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 369-79, 1997.
- V.1** Gonzalez Andrade, Frabricio, "Sistemas pediátricos de atención de emergencia."
- V.2** Gonzalez Andrade, Frabricio, "Criterios en la aplicación del triage hospitalario."
- V.3** de Boer, J., "Tools for evaluating disasters: preliminary results of some hundreds of disasters," *European Journal of Emergency Medicine*, No. 4, pp. 107-10, 1997.
- V.4** Malilay, Josephine et al, "Estimating health risks from natural hazards using risk assessment and epidemiology," *Risk Analysis*, Vol. 17, No. 3, pp. 353-8, 1997.
- V.5** Malpica, Carlos, "Manejo médico de rehenes . . . a propósito de un caso."

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