

DISASTERS

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION IN THE AMERICAS



Issue No. 81

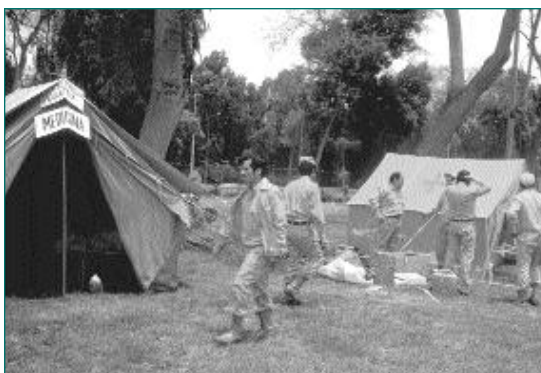
News and Information for the International Disaster Community

July 2000

The Medical Response to Natural Disasters: Have We Learned Anything Yet?

The international community used to learn well from its errors. Several decades ago, following major earthquakes and other sudden-impact disasters, one of the major lessons learned was that the victims were better served by local health services than by foreign medical teams or field hospitals. It soon became clear that this type of assistance arrived too late to make a difference

in terms of saving lives and was not always appropriate—from a cultural or technological standpoint—for the affected country. This heightened sensitivity on the part of the international commu-



Critical life saving medical care must be provided in the first 24 hours, long before mobile field hospitals can be deployed and set up.
Photo: PAHO/WHO

nity translated into greater emphasis on disaster preparedness and a recognition that strengthening the capacity at the local level and fostering solidarity between neighboring countries was the most effective use of resources.

Have we continued to learn from these experiences and to implement what were considered best practices, or is the trend now reversing itself in the international

community? Today, are we earmarking less assistance for disaster preparedness and giving less

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The ISDR and the Provention Consortium

The promotion of disaster reduction is becoming a ubiquitous item on political agendas worldwide. It appears to be most obvious at the inter-agency level where two international coordination initiatives are now dedicated to this topic: the Inter-Agency Task Force of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR, the successor arrangement to the IDNDR),

which was mandated by Resolution 63/99 of the U.N. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)¹, and the ProVention Consortium, launched by the World Bank in February 2000.

The ISDR and ProVention each have distinct strengths and areas of interest. On one side, the ISDR is a formal mechanism for coordination

(cont. on page 7)

¹ See also U.N. General Assembly Resolution 54/219 at <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/54/a54r219.pdf>.

News from PAHO/WHO



New PAHO Disaster Advisor for South America

Dr. Ciro Ugarte has joined PAHO's Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief Coordination Program as the new Subregional Advisor in Quito, Ecuador. Dr. Ugarte will coordinate PAHO/WHO disaster preparedness and mitigation activities in South American countries.

Chemical Accidents Safety Course Offered in Brazil

The WHO Collaborating Center for Disaster Preparedness, CETESB, together with PAHO, is organizing a regional course on Chemical Accidents Safety from 2-6 October. The course will discuss theoretical and practical measures in preparing for chemical accidents.

Topics will include:

- The impact of chemical accidents in the Americas
- Analyzing the emergency plans, organization and distribution of responsibilities of groups involved in chemical accidents
- Studying the principal techniques used to assess risk in the context of chemical accidents
- Discussing the lessons learned from past emergency situations in the Americas
- Mitigation and rehabilitation measures
- Familiarizing disaster managers with sources of



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information on chemical emergencies

- Asimulation exercise

Register for this course by contacting CETESB at [cursos@cetesb.br](mailto: cursos@cetesb.br) or fax (55-11) 303-6651.



PAHO and WHO will release a second edition of the Virtual Disaster Library on CD-Rom in early 2001. In addition to PAHO/WHO publications, the new release will include disaster and emergency management publications of other international agencies. Consult the current collection at: www.vdl-bvd.desastres.net.

PAHO and the Colombian Permanent Mission to the U.N. set up a visual exhibit, *Toward Reduction of Natural Disasters: The Journey of Latin America and the Caribbean*, during this year's ECOSOC meeting at the U.N. in New York.



PAHO/WHO, R. Perez

Stage Set for LIDERES

PAHO's first ever disaster management training course, LIDERES, will take place 30 August - 15 September in Quito, Ecuador. The course attracted over 90 applications from disaster professionals, and will accommodate 33 of them as participants in the course. The demand for the program is already a good indication that the course will continue as an annual training event. For general information on the program please consult the brochure at www.paho.org/english/ped/lideres.htm or e-mail curso-lideres@paho.org.

Other Organizations

UN 2000 World Disaster Reduction Campaign Focuses on Forest Fires

The theme for the 2000 World Disaster Reduction Campaign is "Disaster Reduction, Education and Youth", with specific emphasis on the prevention of forest fires. The major objectives for the campaign are to promote a shift from a mentality of response to one of risk management; to promote a stronger commitment to incorporate reduction in education curricula and to promote greater participation of youth in disaster reduction activities. The campaign will be conducted from August-October, culminating on 11 October 2000, World Disaster Reduction Day 2000. As mentioned in the last issue of this newsletter, WHO Guidelines for Vegetation Fire Events are available online at www.who.int/peh/. For more information on the Campaign, please email: isdr@un.org or fax: (41-22) 917-9098.

Red Cross Examines Lessons Learned from the Balkans

The ICRC/IFRC hosted a workshop on the "Technical Lessons Learned in the 1999 Balkans Crisis" to review aspects of technical cooperation and coordination, to formulate lessons learned and to outline strategies for avoiding (or at least minimizing) problems of technical cooperation. A total of 49 participants took part in the workshop, including representatives from the ICRC, the Federation, the American, British, Canadian, Danish, Finnish, German, Norwegian, Spanish and Swedish Red Cross Societies and the Albanian, Macedonian and Yugoslavian Societies. The workshop was facilitated by a team of moderators drawn from PAHO and WHO. Three working groups were set up: 1) water, sanitation and habitat 2) medical care and public health and 3) Economic security. The conclusions indicated that "issues at the interface of technical disciplines and those related to the operations within and between organizations were priority in the Balkans." The recommendations of the workshop dealt with three basic areas: Human Resources, Information and Experience Exchange and Assessment and Coordination in Joint Operations. For more information on this workshop, please e-mail devillec@paho.org or fax: (202) 775-4578.

The Global Earthquake Safety Initiative

The Global Earthquake Safety Initiative, an initiative of GeoHazards International (GHI) and the UN Center for Regional Development (UNCRD), focuses on helping cities around the world recognize and reduce their risk of life loss in earthquakes. Building on the work of the IDNDR's RADIUS project, this initiative has five objectives:

- (1) To express the risk of life loss in earthquakes in an easy-to-understand form
- (2) To measure trends in a city's risk of life loss in earthquakes and to identify broad causes of those trends
- (3) To produce a tool to broadly evaluate the effectiveness of different mitigation activities
- (4) To identify the risk of life loss in public schools and the potential for reducing that risk, and
- (5) To promote communication in earthquake risk reduction among cities around the world.

This initiative only focuses on the risk of life loss in earthquakes. Earthquakes can produce many other important types of loss, including economic loss, political upheaval and cultural destruction, which are not considered in this initiative. For more information please contact, email: villacis@pangea.stanford.edu, fax: (650) 614-9051.

Redr - A Resource of Expertise for Disaster Relief

RedR, an international charitable organization which maintains a register of carefully selected and trained relief personnel, is looking for disaster professionals who can undertake short-term assignments for humanitarian agencies worldwide. Applicants to the register should have humanitarian motivations and at least three years professional experience in a skill which is relevant for disaster relief (managerial and accountancy skills are particularly in demand). RedR also holds training courses to improve the competence of relief personnel. For more information about how to participate in the training courses and to join or access the register, visit www.redr.org or contact info@redr.demon.co.uk.

 **UNICEF's** new online format at: www.unicef.org/emerg offers easy access to field situation reports, thematic reviews, appeals, and references.

 **The World Disasters Report 2000** was published June 29 and is available online at www.ifrc.org/publicat/wdr2000/.

 The presentations and conclusions of the **3rd Conference of Local Health Authorities of the Americas**, whose theme was "Health and the Quality of Life: Our Municipalities in an Era of Globalization", held in Canada are available online at: www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/congres/quebec in French and in English.

 **UNEP's** new tool, **PREVIEW**, quickly locates relevant websites from among 100 organizations offering reports, data and early warning information on natural and complex hazards. Visit **PREVIEW** at: www.grid.unep.ch/preview.



Member Countries

Forensic Sciences

From 9-14 October, Cuba will host Forensic Sciences '2000. Parallel meetings at this event include: the Congress of Latin-American Associations of Legal Medicine and Medical Dentology; the Congress of Ibero-American Associations of Forensic Sciences; the 4th International Workshop on Medical-Legal Work in Disaster Situations; and the 2nd Latin-American Conference on Society, Violence and Health. On October 11, World Disaster Reduction Day, there will be a special activity on airport and health services in emergency situations such as airline disasters. Contact email: medlegal@informed.sld.cu or eventos@planner.var.cyt.cu for more information.

Ecuador: Mental Health Project for Children

On the last day of Civil Defense Week, a week organized by the Civil Defense and dedicated to preparedness and awareness activities in Ecuador, a ceremony and contest for children took place in the village of Lloa, home to the most affected population of the Guagua Pichincha volcano, with the objective of improving morale of children 6-12 years old affected by the volcano. The contest was also part of a CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) sponsored project to promote mental health in Ecuador following the volcanic activity in the past year.

Other events at this years Civil Defense week included the presentation of seismic geotechnical maps of the province of Manabi and the launching of the Risk Management and Disaster Administration Engineering Studies of the University of Bolivar, Ecuador. For more information please contact bootsma@impsat.net.ec, fax: (59-32) 46-4630.



Public Health Schools Include Disaster Education in Curricula

The XIX Meeting of the ALAESP, the Association of Latin American and Caribbean Public Health Teaching Associations, took place in Havana, Cuba, July 2-4, 2000. Forty-five public health institutions convened to discuss, among other topics, advances made in introducing more topics in public health in schools. In one session, the PAHO/WHO Collaborating Center of the University of Antioquia, Colombia, discussed the recent incorporation of the topic of Emergency and Disaster Health Management in the curricula of post graduate public health schools. ALAESP will recommend that these universities and public health schools assume the responsibility for the training, support and research activities that each disaster affected country carries out after any natural disaster. For more information please contact perezlui@paho.org, fax: (202) 775-4578.

(cont. on page 5)



The Regional Disaster Information Center

CRID Standardizes Disaster Terminology and Promotes Information Exchange in the Region

- ❑ In collaboration with BIREME, the CRID has created a thesaurus of standardized descriptors used in the documentation center's database. This thesaurus is an important tool for analysis of bibliographic information and is becoming an important reference for disaster terminology. The standardization this thesaurus provides will facilitate the exchange of information and collaboration between other documentation centers around the world.
- ❑ CRID is helping to establish national and local information resource centers in Mendoza, **Argentina** and in Trujillo, **Peru** to be linked together, using a similar methodology as used by the CRID to facilitate the processing of documentation a horizontal exchange of disaster information.
- ❑ Costa Rica is in the process of establishing a National Cooperative Disaster Information Network promoted by CRID. The Network comprises sixteen public, private, non-governmental and international organizations committed to gathering, processing and disseminating disaster prevention information. The Network has established three working groups: training, information dissemination, and information management. Main topics to be addressed include health, environment, and natural and social sciences treated from a disaster prevention perspective. Similar initiatives to establish national networks are taking place in Honduras and Guatemala to facilitate and expedite the exchange of information among and within countries. Contact CRID for more information (see page 8).

Disaster Mitigation in the Caribbean

Disaster Mitigation in the Eastern Caribbean

Retrofitting is now complete on the main hospitals in St. Lucia and Grenada to enable them to withstand hurricanes, torrential rains and earthquakes, through a grant from the European Union's DIPECHO project.

A vulnerability survey of the hospitals, conducted several years ago, formed the basis for the non-structural retrofitting work. The two hospitals will be used to demonstrate how much can be achieved with modest funding and how disaster mitigation measures are not a one time activity but rather should be incorporated into the continuing maintenance of facilities.

As part of the project, a publication, "Disaster Mitigation for Health Facilities," was developed focusing on the knowledge hospital administrators and health staff need to assess the vulnerability of a building and prioritize the work required.

Workshops were conducted in Jamaica and Grenada to launch the book and representatives from 11 Caribbean countries attended.

View this publication at www.pahocpc.org/publications/publications.html.



The Duncan Ward of the St. Georges Hospital, Grenada, retrofitted under the DIPECHO project.

Caribbean Disaster Mitigation Project Documents Online

The USAID/OAS Caribbean Disaster Mitigation Project came to a close at the end of 1999. The project's website, www.oas.org/en/cdmp/, was recently completed and remains an excellent source of guidelines and publications including: reference criteria for consulting services for infrastructure projects; drawings to accompany the building guidelines; proceedings of CDMP's 1999 Regional Workshop on Safer Housing; risk transfer and financial experience in the Caribbean; storm

surge mapping for Montego Bay, Jamaica.

A full list of CDMP publications is available on the 'Papers and Publications' page at www.oas.org/en/cdmp/publist.htm. Contact: Steven Stichter, e-mail: [sstichter@oas.org](mailto:ssstichter@oas.org), fax: 202-458-3560.

SUMA to Play Official Role in Central America and the Dominican Republic



Ministries of Foreign Affairs and national disaster organizations in Central America and the Dominican Republic met recently and formally recognized the SUMA system by including it in their Coordination Manuals and Embassy Guidelines, which are designed to improve emergency preparedness and disaster response in these countries. The organizations called for future humanitarian supply management standards to be based on the SUMA methodology.

Further, SUMA-trained nationals from these countries will coordinate the training of personnel who will assist in future emergencies. The Foreign Affairs Manuals will present the framework for how this trained personnel and the SUMA methodology will be formally integrated into national disaster assistance teams. The final version of the Foreign Affairs Manuals will be presented to the governments of Central

America and the Dominican Republic by the end of August 2000.

SUMA in Cuba

Following the SUMA training in Bayamo, Cuba, the provincial capital of Granma, in May 2000, three very important locations are now using SUMA:

1. The local Red Cross, which has a large warehouse for managing donations, and formally uses SUMA's Warehouse Module.
2. The Bayamo town hall also decided to use SUMA as a tool for managing donations and material.
3. The Maternity Children's Hospital, which is being built through donations from countries such as Germany. Here SUMA is being used as a management tool.



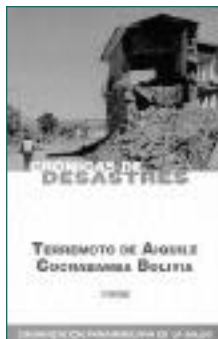
For more information, contact e-mail: funsuma@sol.racsa.co.cr or fax: (506) 290-0973.



Review of Publications

New Disaster Chronicle

A new publication has been added to the PAHO Disaster Chronicle series: *El Terremoto de*

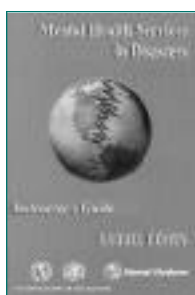


Aiquile-Cochabamba (Bolivia) (the Earthquake in Aiquile-Cochabamba, Bolivia), which occurred in May 1998. In just over 100 pages, the report captures the lessons of this earthquake, one of the most significant in Bolivia's recent history. From the health sector perspective, it reviews the events that occurred during impact, rehabilitation and the beginning of reconstruction in the

affected areas, and highlights, in particular, new experiences in environmental health. The earthquake provided a window of opportunity for political change, because it opened the door to changes in both the structure and attitudes of the national civil defense system.

Other recent publications in the same series include: *Hurricanes Georges and Mitch* and *The 1997/98 El Niño Phenomenon*.

These publications, in Spanish only, are available through the CRID (see page 8).



Mental Health Manuals Now Available In English

PAHO/WHO has just published the English version of the disaster mental health manuals by Dr. Raquel Cohen (see October 1999 issue of this Newsletter).

The titles are: *Mental Health Services in Disasters: Instructor's Guide* and *Mental Health Services in Disasters: Manual for Humanitarian Workers*.

These two publications complement each other and are designed as a tool for reducing social and psychological consequences of any disaster. A limited number of copies of the English-language version is available. Contact the Editor at disaster-publications@paho.org.

Preparedness And Response To Industrial Accidents

The new book, *Acidentes Industriais Ampliados: Desafios e perspectivas para o controle e a prevenção* (Large-scale Industrial Accidents: Challenges and Perspectives in Control and Prevention), which is available only in Portuguese, examines in-depth and from different perspectives, the origins and the prevention and response to this type of accident in Latin America.



Emphasis is placed on the most important theoretical and methodological aspects of the causes of industrial accidents; the scenarios in which they occur; planning for the emergencies and managing the disasters they create; and institutional strategies for control and preparedness.

To order the book, contact editora@fiocruz.br or unesp-unb@uol.com.br; fax (55-21) 507-5141.

New Training Material on Chemical Accidents

Training material on preparedness, mitigation and response to disasters brought on by chemical products is now available on the Internet. This is a collection of educational technical documents, focusing on the most relevant aspects of these issues in Latin America and the Caribbean

The material was originally prepared for and international course held in Sao Paulo, Brazil in October 1999, organized by CETESB (Sao Paulo's Environmental



Health Technology Company) and PAHO/WHO. The technical documents—both text and PowerPoint presentations—from the course can be consulted or downloaded from the web site. PAHO will also make this material available on CD-ROM in the coming months.

Visit <http://www.disaster.info.desastres.net/acc-quimicos/chem.htm>. For more information, write to disaster-publications@paho.org.

Medical Response to Natural Disasters

(from page 1)

regard to respecting established standards and levels of technology in the affected regions?

Hurricane Mitch and other recent global disasters hinted that indeed, we may be back to square one. International assistance is again becoming a very high-profile business that is not attuned, or worse, insensitive to local realities. Geared toward satisfying the urge in donor countries to do something quick and politically correct, often this aid is designed to meet the expectations of the public in donor countries rather than to focus on the rehabilitation or reconstruction needs of the victims.

For example, in recent earthquakes around the world, governments, Red Cross Societies or NGOs dispatched field hospitals weeks after the last casualties had received medical attention from local services. It would appear that the voice of the mass media carried more weight than the tech-



Educating donors—particularly individuals in donor countries—can be one of the best ways to curb the most wasteful or detrimental practices when it comes to providing humanitarian relief. These practices are often the result of inexperience or pressure from within the donor country. To reverse current trends, a major global campaign must be launched. World Disaster Reduction Day, celebrated each October, extends beyond governments and organizations to reach a broad cross section of the general public. This would be an excellent forum in which to highlight this issue. Perhaps the 2001 Disaster Reduction Day theme could focus on Effective Humanitarian Aid. For information on this year's campaign, Disaster Reduction, Education and Youth, visit www.unisdr.org.

nical objections of WHO's local coordinators.

The latest, and as always excellent, publication of the *World Disaster Report* raised several important issues. One was the weak coordination role played by the UN agencies. The authors recognized, rightly so, that in a highly-politicized environment, coordination is an uphill struggle.

The ISDR and the Provention Consortium

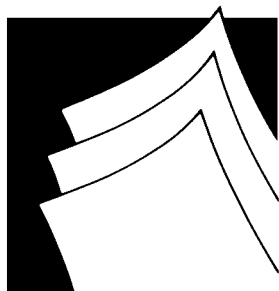
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among UN agencies, regional organizations and non-governmental associations or organizations with a strong scientific and social orientation. On the other side, ProVention has gained credibility from its leading sponsoring role, its access to the financial world and its high-level Presiding Council. Unfortunately, both initiatives have failed to avoid the appearance of duplication of efforts or competition for scarce resources. The

time has come for these initiatives to better coordinate their approach and proactively and transparently seek complementary positions.

This will be an urgent task and challenge for the soon-to-be appointed Director of the Secretariat for the ISDR², replacing Mr. Philippe Boule who left the position on 31 July 2000 after five years as the Director of the IDNDR and ISDR.

² Individuals who are interested in the position of Director of the ISDR should direct their inquiries to Mrs. Carolyn McAskie, Emergency Relief Coordinator, U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) at fax (202) 963-1312; e-mail: mcaskie@un.org.



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.

- A.10** Lavell, Allan, "Un encuentro con la verdad: los desastres en América Latina durante 1998," *Anuario Social y Político de América Latina y el Caribe*, Year 2, 1998.
- B.1** Mendez Hernandez, Haward L., "Proceso de toma de decisiones gerenciales en el plan de respuesta industrial para emergencias con materiales peligrosos." Separate from *Planificación de Operaciones de Emergencias Industriales con Materiales Peligrosos*, 1997.
- B.2** Villagrán, Juan Carlos, "Sistemas comunitarios de alerta temprana en América Central."
- B.3** Koscheyev, Victor S. et al, "Lessons learned and unsolved public health problems after large-scale disasters," *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine*, Vol. 12, No. 12, pp. 49-64, April-June 1997.
- B.4** Watson, Charles C. "The arbitrator of storms: a high-resolution, GIS based system for integrated storm hazard modeling." *National Weather Digest*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 2-9, December 1995.
- B.5** Bisbal Sanz, Alberto, "Plan de mantenimiento preventivo y correctivo en instalaciones sanitarias en hospitales y edificaciones," *Ingeniería Sanitaria y Ambiental*, No. 15, pp. 13-17, November 1998.

Disasters: Preparedness and Mitigation in the Americas is the Newsletter of the Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief Coordination Program of the Pan American Health Organization, Regional Office for the Americas of the World Health Organization. The reported events, activities and programs do not imply endorsement by PAHO/WHO, nor do the statements made necessarily represent the policy of the Organization. The publication of this Newsletter has been made possible through the financial support of the International Humanitarian Assistance Division of the Canadian International Development Agency (IHA/CIDA), the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance of the U.S. Agency for International Development (OFDA/AID), and the Department for International Development of the U.K.

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