

DISASTERS



PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION IN THE AMERICAS



Pan American Health Organization
Regional Office of the
World Health Organization

Issue No. 87

News and Information for the International Disaster Community

April 2002

Editorial

Transparency is Not a One-Way Street

In recent years, the international community has focussed its attention, and rightly so, on the need for good governance in developing countries. Today, transparency and accountability are no longer just slogans but prerequisites for aid from abroad.

Humanitarian aid, which has seen its share of abuses and mismanagement in the Americas and globally is no exception. In the past, the misuse of donations, whether material or financial, has deprived disaster victims of a significant source of aid. Therefore, any improvements to the system in the area of accountability would certainly benefit disaster-stricken communities.

Unfortunately, the humanitarian community, including bilateral agencies, international organizations and NGOs, often views transparency and accountability as a one-way street, a strong dose of medicine to be administered to local governments in emergency or disaster situations. However, national disaster coordinators in Latin American and Caribbean countries also have expressed frustration at the lack of accountability on the part of the external humanitarian response when it comes to coordinating and justifying post-disaster actions.

As we know, reality is always more complex. Prejudices, politics, turf issues and other non-humanitarian considerations can influence the judgement of non-governmental or UN organizations as well as



Photo: PAHO/WHO, J. Jenkins

Transparency must apply to all actors in humanitarian operations. If governments are tasked with managing aid in a transparent and accountable fashion, then agencies from outside the disaster-affected country must be held to the same standards when managing other commodities such as information.

local governments. How then can we overcome the lingering feeling in disaster-affected countries that emergency response is predominantly donor-driven, in response to press coverage and therefore public opinion, rather than to priorities determined by local governments or communities?

Fortunately, the problem is being addressed in an increasingly straightforward manner by the international community. The Red Cross System and NGOs have launched Sphere, a valuable initiative for setting standards for humanitarian relief and monitoring

(cont. on page 7)

INSIDE

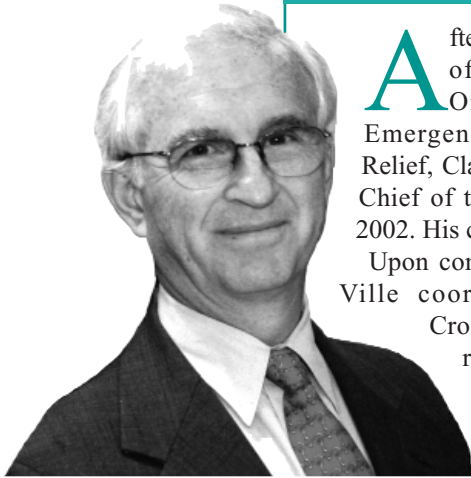
News from PAHO/WHO	2
Other Organizations	3
Member Countries	4
Publications and Multimedia	6
Selected Bibliography	8



What happens when you gather 25 high-level disaster managers from governmental and non-governmental organizations? You create an opportunity to initiate change in traditional disaster prevention, mitigation and response measures. This has been the goal of the LIDERES course since 2000, as executives in the field have gathered in Ecuador, Costa Rica

(cont. on page 7)

Claude de Ville de Goyet Retires as Director of PAHO's Disaster Program



After more than 25 years at the helm of the Pan American Health Organization's Program on Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief, Claude de Ville de Goyet retired as Chief of the Program at the end of April 2002. His career represents quite a journey.

Upon completing medical school, Dr. de Ville coordinated a joint UNDP/Red Cross/Government of Niger famine relief program and managed other health and emergency relief programs in Zaire, Tunisia and South Africa. In 1976, he was the Executive Director of the

Research Center on Disaster Epidemiology (CRED) at the University of Louvain, Belgium when a massive and destructive earthquake ravaged Guatemala. This quake came on the heels of two other major seismic events: the Huaylas Canyon earthquake in Peru 67,000 dead and 150,000 injured and a magnitude 7.5 event in Nicaragua, which left 10,000 dead and 400,000 affected. The health sector in the Americas realized that it must improve its own performance through planning and training. In 1976, the Ministers of Health of PAHO's member countries called on PAHO to establish a disaster unit to define the policy of the Organization, to formulate a plan of action for the various types of disasters . . .

Dr. de Ville, who worked in Guatemala following the 1976 earthquake, was tapped to create this new Program. Over the course of the next 25

years, he transformed a two-person office into a truly regional disaster reduction program for the health sector. Today there are more than 40 full-time staff in eight countries in Latin America and the Caribbean and the support of a multidisciplinary cadre of disaster focal points culled from among staff in PAHO's country offices throughout the Hemisphere.

Claude de Ville will be known and remembered for many things. As one U.N. staff member said, he, . . . never tried to promote Dr. de Ville de Goyet; was always innovative; never waved the flag of PAHO; always fighting to do a better job for those who need help. To those words his colleagues add: architect and promoter extraordinaire of SUMA and CRID; avid photographer of some of the Program's best slides; someone who has opened doors to other UN agencies, NGOs and non-traditional partners such as diplomats, banks, the military and others; a visionary, never short of ideas or new ways to solve old problems; and an unwavering conviction that his job was to serve the disaster community of the Americas.

Few who have met Claude de Ville will forget him. Few who have worked with him will deny that he has left an indelible mark on the disaster community. And all those in Latin America and the Caribbean who live in conditions of vulnerability to disasters, are grateful for his pioneering efforts in the field.

Dr. de Ville will remain active in the disaster field. His new e-mail address is cdevill@attglobal.com.

At the December 2001 Hemispheric Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Costa Rica, the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance paid tribute to Claude de Ville, saying "...your insight, creativity and search for innovative ways to overcome challenges have played an immeasurable role in reaching our collective goal of saving lives and reducing losses caused by disasters. You have broken new ground and opened new paths."

New Leadership for PAHO Disaster Program

Dr. Jean Luc Poncelet has been appointed Chief of PAHO's Program on Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief as of 1 May 2002. A national of Belgium, he has degrees in medicine and public health. For the last 16 years, he has served as a disaster expert in a series

of PAHO posts in Costa Rica, Antigua, Barbados, Ecuador, and since 1999, as regional adviser in PAHO headquarters in Washington. Dr. Poncelet can be contacted by phone: (202) 974-3434; fax: (202) 775-4578 or e-mail at poncelej@paho.org.

Other Organizations

Access to Information on Health and Disasters is Improving in Central America Thanks to the CRID/NLM Project

A little more than one year ago (see issues 82 and 83 of this Newsletter), the Regional Disaster Information Center (CRID), with support from the U.S. National Library of Medicine (NLM) and PAHO, began a project to support information centers in Honduras and Nicaragua. The results have been so positive that NLM has expanded financing to include three sites in El Salvador. These information centers are now receiving support in the form of equipment to provide Internet access and specialized training on disaster information management and the creation of information services (databases and web pages).

Two training sessions were held during 2001 (one in Costa Rica and another at NLM headquarters in the US). In Honduras and Nicaragua, progress is very visible, and in some centers, spectacular. In Tegucigalpa, the National Medical Library, with enthusiasm and dedication, has used support from the project as the cornerstone for developing library services and reaching out to national authorities, the academic sector and students. The support is more than just theoretical: the university has destined ten new computers to this library. Where one year ago there was only one computer, today the library has network with 13 computers with full Internet access. The Library has replicated the training it has received throughout the country for students, academic per-

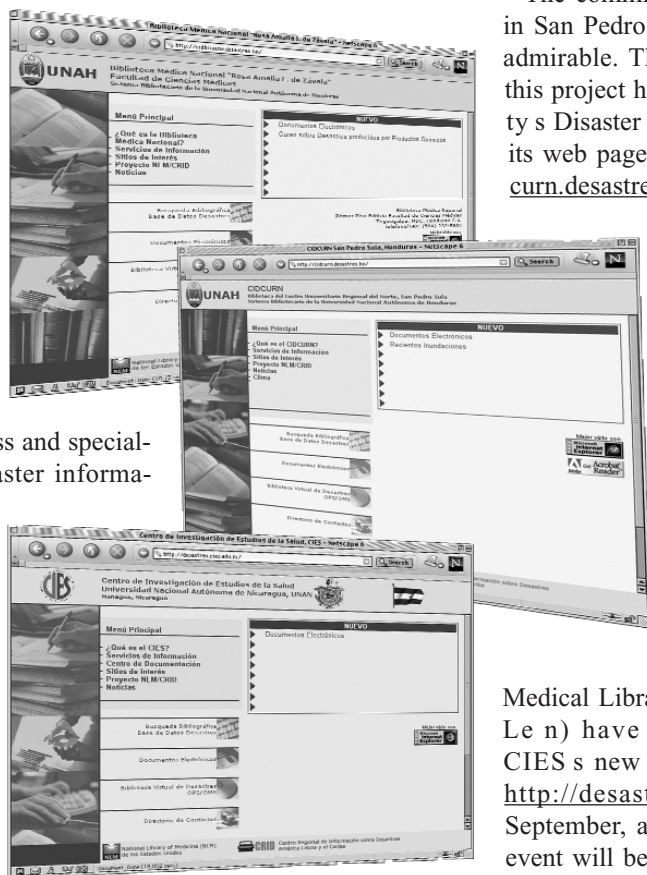
sonnel, and disaster organizations such as the national emergency committee, COPECO. The library's new web page <http://cidbimena.desastres.hn> is a positive example of the excellent local initiative.

The commitment of the university in San Pedro Sula, Honduras is also admirable. The building destined to this project has become the university's Disaster Information Center and its web page is on line at <http://cid-curn.desastres.hn>. A network of ten computers (seven donated by the university itself) offers information services not only to the university community, but to all disaster organizations in the area.

In Nicaragua the two centers participating in the project (the CIES Health Studies Research Center and the Medical Library of the University of León) have also kept pace. The CIES's new web page is online at <http://desastres.cies.edu.ni>. Next September, a third regional training event will be held at the CIES. This training will focus on more advanced aspects of Internet use and on new technologies. This new effort is expected to strengthen activities in the three countries.

Thanks to this project, the CRID is converting to digital format an important part of its bibliographic collection to make distribution easier, quicker and less expensive. More than 250 documents are already available in electronic format on the web. They have also been included on CD-ROM, which is available for use at all participating centers. For more information on this project, contact crid@crid.or.cr.

Thanks to all those who completed the survey included with the last issue of the Newsletter. There is still time to voice your opinion! If you still have the survey from the last issue, please take a moment to complete it and send it in. Don't have a survey? Please e-mail disaster@paho.org and we will send you an electronic version. Thanks for your help.





Member Countries

Panama: Disaster Management Course

The School of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine of the University of Panama initiated the III Intensive Course on Health and Disaster Management in April. PAHO and the Social Security Institute of Panama support the course, which runs three evenings a week through the end of June 2002. The course follows the structure proposed by the Central American Commission on University Education for Disasters and is similar to the LIDERES course. It targets hospital directors and administrators, although it is not limited to the health sector. For more information contact Dr. Laura de Thomas, who is a 2001 graduate of the

LIDERES course, at fax (507) 262-8780 or e-mail: lthomas@sinfo.net.

Around the Caribbean

Disaster management personnel in key Caribbean institutions will soon begin participating in Internet workshops to familiarize them with disaster mitigation, preparedness and response tools on the Internet, including the Virtual Disaster Library, hazardous materials databases and other reference and resource sites. The first pilot workshops will be organized in Barbados and St. Lucia, in coordination with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA), national disaster management organizations, as well as other related institutions.

In preparation for hurricane season, national health disaster plans are being reviewed. The best plans undergo a constant testing process, through simulation exercises, to update and improve them as necessary. Effective disaster plans deal not only with hurricanes, but also contain elements of a hospital plan, a mass casualty management plan (a serious threat for small countries year round), and a checklist for mass gatherings.

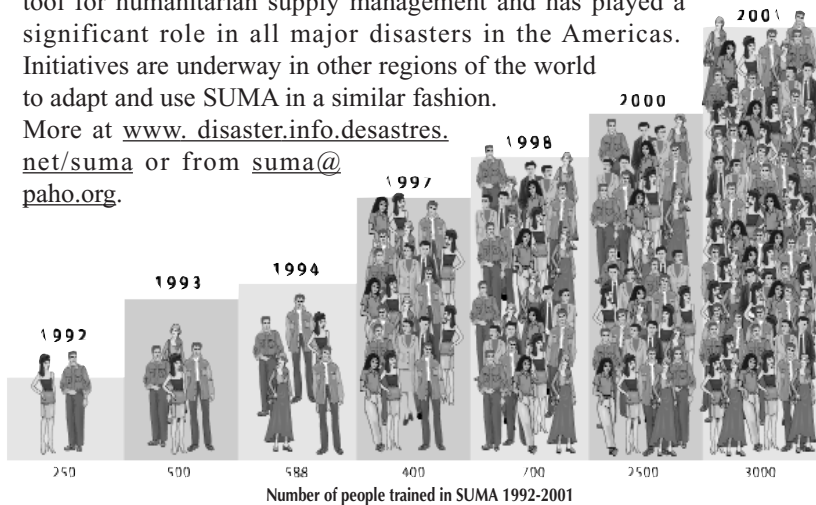
Public and private hospitals and smaller health centers in the Caribbean are receiving a stock of disaster mitigation publications to encourage them to check their facilities and, where possible, implement technical recommendations to protect buildings before the start of the hurricane season.

For information on any of these initiatives, consult www.disaster.info.desastres.net/carib/ or write to disaster@cpc.paho.org.

SUMA Turns 10!

SUMA, the Humanitarian Supply Management Project, began in 1992 with funding from the Government of the Netherlands. In the last ten years, more than 3000 volunteers have been trained to use SUMA software and manage humanitarian supplies. Additionally, national SUMA teams, whose members represent many professions and institutions, have been set up to respond in disaster situations. The result of ten years of hard work by the countries is that SUMA is the standard regional tool for humanitarian supply management and has played a significant role in all major disasters in the Americas. Initiatives are underway in other regions of the world to adapt and use SUMA in a similar fashion.

More at www.disaster.info.desastres.net/suma or from suma@paho.org.



Training, as a means of developing self-reliance in humanitarian supply management, is an important part of SUMA. However, some disasters are so overwhelming, especially in smaller countries, that it may be unrealistic to expect local professionals to sort through incoming supplies. Other life-saving priorities will prevail! This is when assistance among neighbors comes into play and accounts for, in part, the growing number of people trained to manage SUMA.

South America at a Glance

Technical cooperation among countries became a reality in the Southern Cone with the visit of representatives from Brazil's Ministry of Health and Civil Defense to Santiago, Chile. At a series of meetings with counterparts from Chile's Ministry of Health, External Relations, University of Chile, Civil Defense, National Forest Corporation, SAMU, National Firefighters Commission, the Red Cross and the Office for National, Brazilian disaster managers exchanged experiences and analyzed

bilateral assistance proposals with their colleagues in Chile. Other achievements included the strengthening of relations between the health sector and Civil Defense, which will facilitate the execution of joint disaster mitigation, preparedness and response measures.

¥ Bolivia's Ministry of Health fulfilled its commitment to provide permanent personnel and a regular public budget to recently created Disaster Preparedness and Response Unit. The hard work of the staff from this department was evident during the serious floods that occurred in February, where the Unit helped to coordinate the well-executed health response. The

Unit also has Internet access and its own web site: www.digesa-bo.net.

¥ National and state-level disaster managers from the health sector and civil defense participated in Brazil's National Planning Workshop in March, under the auspices of Brazil's Ministry of Health. PAHO/WHO and the Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA/USAID) offered support as well. The workshop concluded with the preliminary design of a national training program on disasters and health. This will require approval of the health authorities in Brazil, technical support from PAHO and assistance with methodology from OFDA.

Journalists and Health Sector Meet in Honduras

How far should journalists go in warning the community about the probability of an imminent disaster? This question, along with others, was the subject of debate between Honduran journalists and the Ministry of Health in Honduras at a day-long workshop on information management during disasters.

The journalists reflected on the most critical public health issues in disaster management, such when, who and how to vaccinate? When should journalists report certain disaster information and how? How to request international aid that fits with the damage and needs assessment? Do epi-

demics emerge after a disaster? The journalists were particularly interested in risk and vulnerability reduction in Honduras, concluding that they can help to reduce vulnerability by using the media to run public education campaigns on resource conservation and proper basic sanitation

in communities and homes.

This meeting strengthened the relationship between the media and the Honduran Ministry of Health, which also contributed valuable insights from its disaster-related experiences. The media can help to ensure that the public is not unduly alarmed by sensationalistic news; health institu-

tions, on the other hand, should make correct and useful information available to the public in a timely fashion. The best strategy is one of coordination and information management protocols, an excellent role for Honduras Permanent Contingency Commission (COPECO). The media suggested

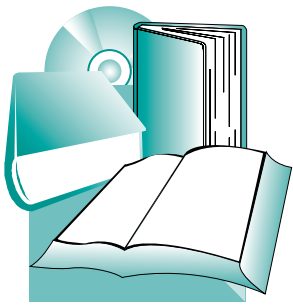
holding a Central American meeting on the topic of information management in disasters. For more information contact Beatriz Velez, PAHO/WHO Honduras at velezb@hon.ops-oms.org.



Photo: IDB, D. Mangurian

Hurricane Season Approaching!

"The 2002 hurricane season will see more hurricanes than average—including four major storms," this according to Colorado State University Professor William Gray and his colleagues. The WMO selects the names for storms and retires the names of particularly devastating hurricanes. Six lists of names are used in rotation. The names of the 2002 hurricanes and tropical storms in the Atlantic are: Arthur, Bertha, Cristobal, Dolly, Edouard, Fay, Gustav, Hanna, Isidore, Josephine, Kyle, Lili, Marco, Nana, Omar, Paloma, Rene, Sally, Teddy, Vicky and Wilfred.



Publications and Multimedia

A Critical Look at Hurricanes Georges and Mitch

The publication *The Storms of '98: Hurricanes Georges and Mitch. Impact, institutional response, and policies for disasters in three countries* (authors Olson, Richard S.; Alvarez, Ricardo A; Baird, Bruce P.; Estrada, Amelia; Gawronski, Vincent T.; Sarmiento Prieto, Juan Pablo) was published earlier in English by the Natural Hazards Research Center of the University of Colorado.

This excellent publication has been translated into Spanish and is now available through the web page of the Regional Disaster Information Center (CRID) at www.crid.or.cr/digitalizacion/pdf/spa/doc13932/doc13932.htm.

This study analyzes, with a critical eye, the impact, the institutional response, and the disaster policies of Hurricane Georges in the Dominican Republic (Sept. 1998) and Mitch in Honduras and Nicaragua in (Oct. 1998), including

the way the press dealt with both disasters. Special attention is paid to the way in which agencies and organizations in these three countries, which should have been responsible for response and coordination, were marginalized.

Download the Spanish version of the publication from the CRID web site at the address above. The English version is on the web site of the Natural Hazards Center of the University of Colorado at www.colorado.edu/hazards/sp/sp38/sp38.html.



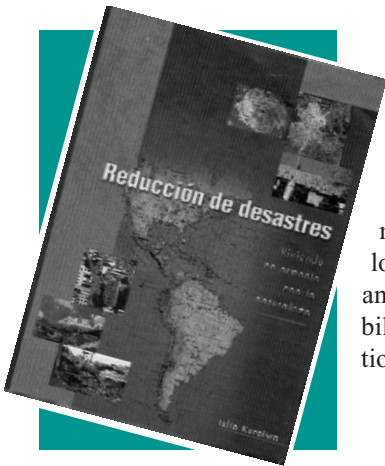
Disaster Reduction: Living in Harmony with Nature

Julio Kuroiwa. 2002 (Spanish only)

This comprehensive publication looks at disaster prevention from an overall multidisciplinary point of view. In a departure from a more traditional focus on this issue, this book looks at aspects of social science and economics and how they can be applied to reduce vulnerability to these natural phenomena. The publication is the product of field studies carried out at

the site of the most important disasters in the Americas in the last 30 years. Its ten chapters range from geological phenomena to climatological disasters to reducing social vulnerability.

For an overview of the content of each chapter, visit the publication's web site at: www.reducciondedesastresjk.com/. For information on ordering write to: jkuroiwah@infonegocio.com.pe.



PAHO Publications Catalog 2002 Includes Disaster Publications

This updated catalog contains all PAHO and WHO publications on important public health issues, reflecting current knowledge of new and old problems, ongoing research, and important health achievements in the Americas. It also includes several publications that PAHO has coedited with organizations such as the World Bank, the American Association of Public Health, and the American Cancer Society. Disasters, health and equity, communicable and noncommunicable diseases, health promotion, and environmental health are but a few of themes addressed

by the works included.

Visit the PAHO publications web page at <http://publications.paho.org/english/index.cfm> to download the catalog or browse through the site to see what is available. For a print copy of the catalog, e-mail sales@paho.org.



A One-Way Street?

(from page 1)

compliance. The result is that transparency and accountability in the relief activities of larger NGOs are expected to improve.

The UN should pursue similar efforts toward improving transparency and participation. One way is to step up consultation with national experts in the early planning stage as well as during the implementation of a relief operation. The evolution of UNDAC, the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination team, from a predominantly donor body to a subregional team and capacity, is a positive step. Another way is to include expert representatives from affected or at-risk recipient countries in external reviews or evaluations of major UN humanitarian initiatives. We can only share the concern of PAHO's Member Countries when noting that funding governments are the only ones represented in the review groups of important initiatives such as OCHA's Military and Civil Defense Unit (MDCU). Indeed, civil-military coordination is a matter of prime sensitivity in Latin America. Perhaps this shortcoming is the result of an over-emphasis on so-called complex disasters, where governments are either nonexistent or part of the problem itself.

A broad consultation process with UN diplomatic missions should be complemented by similar initiatives that allow national experts, vested with the operational responsibility for disaster management in their country, to participate.

On the bright side, the UN is making significant progress in several areas. As noted earlier, OCHA is transforming the post-disaster role of the UNDAC team from a tool that served the UN Coordinator into an instrument to strengthen local authorities who are

responsible for humanitarian assistance and coordination. This changing role was apparent in the wake of the flash floods in La Paz, Bolivia in February 2002, when OCHA directed UNDAC's technical support toward the affected municipality.

Confirming this encouraging shift, OCHA, with the collaboration of PAHO and CEPREDENAC, the Center for the Coordination of Natural Disaster Prevention in Central America, will organize a workshop in Costa Rica at the end of May to discuss ways and means of improving this coordination. Representatives from Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Civil Defense and the health sector will review with UN officials and UNDAC experts past experiences in this Region.

Still, much remains to be done to transform international humanitarian assistance (particularly following natural disasters in countries with legitimate and functional governments) from a short-term charity operation into a participatory process that respects both the authority and the limitations of local institutions. Of special concern is the impact that foreign military humanitarian interventions can have on fragile civilian leadership. Without a doubt, a mechanism must be sought to ensure that the voice of civilian institutions in developing countries carries its due weight, both in operations and in the UN review of use of military and civil defense assets.



Photo: PAHO/WHO, J. Jenkins

Over the last two decades, countries that are vulnerable to disasters have garnered a great deal of disaster management expertise. The UNDAC will study ways to incorporate the knowledge and experience of these experts into future assessment missions in the Americas.

LIDERES Course in Mexico

(from page 1)

and Argentina for the intensive 18-day course on managerial aspects of disaster risk reduction.

The fourth LIDERES course will take place in **Cuernavaca, Mexico from October 7-24, 2002**. It is an excellent opportunity to tackle challenges and exchange knowledge and experiences with disaster managers from different parts of the hemisphere. Although the course has theoretical components, it relies heavily on discussion and

analysis of new proposals. Consequently, LIDERES is a participatory and interactive course.

For more information, visit the website www.disaster.info.desastres.net/LIDERES. Direct inquiries to curso-lideres@paho.org or to Dr. Adriana Ramirez Sanchez of the National Institute of Public Health in Mexico (co-organizer of the course) at ramirez@correo.insp.mx.



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.

- E.1** Alvarez Gutierrez, Sergio. *Salud ambiental en el contexto de los desastres naturales*. REPINDEX (67):1-12; April, 1999.
- E.2** Gilgan, Megan. *The rationality of resistance: alternatives for engagement in complex emergencies*. The Journal of Disaster Studies, Policy and Management; 25(1): 1-18; March, 2001.
- E.3** Glass, Thomas A. and Monica Schoch-Spana. *Bioterrorism and the people: how to vaccinate a city against panic*. Confronting Biological Weapons; No. 34, Jan. 2002.
- E.4** Parker, Dennis et al. *Reducing vulnerability following flood disasters: Issues and practices*. Reconstruction after disasters: Issues and practices. Aldershot, Brookfield, Ashgate Publishing, 23-44, 1997.
- E.5** Drabek, Thomas E. *Disaster Warning and Evacuation Responses by Private Business Employees*. The Journal of Disaster Studies, Policy and Management; 25(1): 76-94. March 2001.
- E.6** Wisner, Ben. *Lessons from Cuba? Hurricane Michelle*. London School of Economics. Development Studies of Economics, Nov. 2001. 6p.

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.

Correspondence and inquiries should be addressed to:

The Editor
Disasters: Preparedness and Mitigation
in the Americas
Pan American Health Organization
525 Twenty-third Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037, U.S.A.
Tel: 202-974-3522 • Fax: 202-775-4578
E-mail: disaster-newsletter@paho.org
www.paho.org/disasters/



Regional Disaster Information Center
Apdo. 3745-1000, San José, Costa Rica
Fax: (506) 231-5973
E-mail: crid@crid.or.cr
www.crid.or.cr

April 2002

FIRST CLASS

Postage and Fees Paid
PAHO
Permit Number G-61

Disasters: Preparedness and Mitigation in the Americas
Pan American Health Organization
525 Twenty-third Street, N.W.
Washington, D. C. 20037-2895
Official Business
Penalty for Private Use \$300