

DISASTERS

PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION IN THE AMERICAS



Pan American Health Organization
Regional Office of the
World Health Organization

Issue No. 86

News and Information for the International Disaster Community

January 2002

In Central America, Communities Embrace Disaster Preparedness

Many of the most successful disaster reduction initiatives have been the result of community participation and ownership of both the activities and the expected results.

Local communities have always played a critical role in reducing their vulnerability to disasters. Well-organized and trained communities, who best know the hazards that surround them, assume responsibility and work in tandem with national authorities to reduce their risk, are key to ensuring sustainability of these initiatives. For many years, NGOs and local organizations have worked hand in hand with community groups, often with impressive results. Today, thanks to a project to reduce disaster vulnerability in the Central American countries affected by Hurricane Mitch (funded by the Governments of Sweden and Great Britain), PAHO has also stepped up activities at the community level.

The community turns out for a parade

Almost 3,000 residents of the municipality of Moyogalpa, located on the volcanic island of Ometepe in the southern part of Lake Nicaragua, took to the streets last August to participate in what became the most all-inclusive educational and cultural disaster prevention activity ever organized in Nicaragua.



Photo PAHO/WHO

The "Disaster Day" featured a unique parade of 15 floats that portrayed aspects of disaster preparedness and prevention. The theme of the floats depicted each sector's perception of their vulnerability and the risk they face living each day at the foot of the Concepción volcano. The community was involved in all stages of the event—from planning, to designing and building the floats, to participating in the parade. All age groups (local school children designed the special t-shirts and caps that participants wore) and many different sectors were represented, displaying not only their

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Please complete
the enclosed
survey

Most readers don't notice the issue number that appears on each newsletter, yet this issue, number 86, marks more than 23 consecutive years of publishing this newsletter. Today, as almost a quarter century ago, the primary purpose is to serve as a channel of communication for the more than 26,000 persons who receive it four times a year.

(cont. on page 7)

News from PAHO/WHO

PAHO Staff on the Move

PAHO Disaster

Office in Costa Rica has Moved!

Please note the new
phone and fax numbers
or this office:

Phone: (506) 224-6941;

224-6395; 224-6690

Fax: (506) 224-6941

Brian Donaldson has been named PAHO Subregional Disaster Adviser for the Caribbean, effective 1 February. He is based at the PAHO Caribbean Program Coordination Office in Barbados. He may be reached at donaldsb@cpc.paho.org; fax: (246) 436-6447.

Dr. Dana van Alphen, previously based in Barbados, has been named the PAHO Subregional Disaster Adviser for Central America. She is based in San Jose, Costa Rica and may be contacted at vanalphd@cor.ops-oms.org; fax: (506) 224-7758.

Claudio Osorio, PAHO's disaster mitigation adviser, has moved from Costa Rica to CEPIS, the Pan American Center for Sanitary Engineering in Lima, Peru. In his new position, he will deal with disaster mitigation in water and sanitation systems. Contact him at cosorio@cepis.ops-oms.org; fax: (51-1) 437-8289.



Consult www.paho.org/disasters for contact information on all PAHO staff in the Americas (click on "Contact Us").

A Century of Public Health Achievements in the Americas

2002
1992
1982
1972
1962
1952
1942
1932
1922
1912



The Pan American Health Organization launched the celebration of its 100th anniversary, marking a century since its founding in Washington, D.C. A hemispheric agency with 35 Member Countries throughout the Americas, PAHO also serves as the Regional Office of the World Health Organization.

PAHO was founded in December 1902 during the International Sanitary Convention. Chief among the health concerns of the time were yellow fever and other infectious diseases that were being spread through the burgeoning maritime commerce of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

PAHO's more recent and notable public health contributions include the eradication of polio in the Western Hemisphere, the dramatic reduction of infant mortality rates and improved life spans, and growing access to basic health care throughout the Region.

The Organization's Program on Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief was created in 1976 to support the ministries of health in creating and strengthening the health sector's programs for disaster preparedness, mitigation and response.

As PAHO turns the corner into its second century, countries in the Americas have demonstrated a clear commitment to disaster preparedness and mitigation in their health sector initiatives. Much has been accomplished in just the last 25 years, as the Region has moved from simple *ad hoc* disaster response to an integrated vision of disaster reduction, where all sectors of society cooperate to reduce their common vulnerability to natural and manmade disasters. There is every indication that Latin America and the Caribbean are facing this challenge head on.

Other Organizations

The CIDI Reaches Out to Latin America and the Caribbean on Donations Management Issues

The Center for International Disaster Information (CIDI) is operated by Volunteers in Technical Assistance (VITA) and targets public awareness activities to address the issues of appropriate donations and volunteer practices.

In October 2001, the Center and the American Red Cross co-hosted a briefing for embassy personnel from Latin America and the Caribbean to encourage countries to examine their own donations management policies and institute regulations to discourage the collection, transport and warehousing of inappropriate items from the U.S. or other well-intentioned donors.

The briefing's special guest speaker was

Ambassador Rene León Rodríguez of the Embassy of El Salvador, who made an insightful presentation on the embassy's experiences with donations management following the 2001 earthquakes.



Learn more about CIDI activities in Latin America and the Caribbean on their web www.cidi.org or contact the Center at cidi@cidi.org.

CRED Database

The Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) at the School of Public Health of the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium, has been a WHO Collaborating Center for the past two decades and now maintains an excellent database on emergency events on the Internet. A disaster profiles section extracts information from the database EM-DAT, which con-

tains core data on the occurrence and effects of more than 12,500 disasters from 1900 to the present (conflicts are not included). For all profiles, the data is presented in three sub-sets: the top 10 occurrences, a chronological table and raw data. Data goes back to 1900 and the period 1975-2000 has been recently updated. Available online at www.cred.be/emdat.

Call for Nominations Clarence H. Moore Award for Voluntary Service

The Pan American Health and Education Foundation (The Foundation) is seeking nominations for the Clarence H. Moore Award, which recognizes national or local NGOs or PVOs operating in Latin America or the Caribbean, or individuals associated with them, whose work has resulted in outstanding contributions in an area of public health important to PAHO.

Many outstanding NGOs in the Americas work tirelessly at local, national and regional level to reduce the Region's vulnerability to disasters—a priority of most of PAHO's Member Governments. Learn how to nominate one of these organizations (or any other working in the field of public health). Consult the Foundation's web site



at www.paho.org/English/PAHEF/moore.htm or e-mail pahef@paho.org.

Nominations must be received by 15 August 2002.



Member Countries

ORAS and PAHO Host Internet Workshop

Attention: Disaster Professionals in the Andean Region

The Andean Region e-mail discussion group, managed by ORAS/CHU, is seeking members to join in a moderated discussion of disaster issues.

To join, send an e-mail to the list administrator at:

mmorales@conhu.org.pe.



Disaster preparedness, prevention and response is one of the priority areas of technical cooperation between the Andean Health Organization/Convenio Hipólito Unanue (ORAS/CHU) and the Pan American Health Organization. Within this framework, several joint

activities are planned, including a review of common information systems for damage assessment, training in hospital disaster preparedness and a subregional workshop to exchange lessons learned on vulnerability assessment and disaster mitigation in health facilities. In January, ORAS and PAHO hosted a two-day Internet workshop for professionals responsible for disaster prevention and response programs and the Office of Informatics of the Ministries of Health of Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Peru y Venezuela. The hands-on workshop resulted in several important initiatives: an Andean Region e-mail discussion group was created; a space on the ORAS/CHU web page is now dedicated to disasters (see www.conhu.org.pe/) and an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of disaster programs in the Andean Region yielded areas of mutual cooperation among the countries. For the complete meeting report, visit the ORAS/CHU web site.

World Trade Center-related Injuries



A rapid assessment by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the type and severity of injuries among a sample of survivors who received emergency care at five New York City hospitals in the first 48 hours after the attack on the World Trade Center in September 2001 reveals:

- Inhalation injuries were the most common type in this group (49%), followed by eye injuries (26%), lacerations (14%) and sprains and strains (14%). More than half of survivors (56%) were treated for inhalation injuries, eye injuries, or both without other injuries. Most of these injuries were caused by smoke, dust, debris or fumes.
- Fractures (6%), burns (5%), and closed head injuries (2%) were less common, but most survivors with these injuries required further hospitalization for treatment.
- The arrival of survivors at nearby hospitals peaked in the first 2 to 3 hours. Half of survivors received medical care within 7 hours. Approximately one-quarter (282) of survivors arrived at hospitals by emergency medical transport.
- Rescue workers sustained significantly more eye injuries than other survivors (39% vs. 19%) but fewer burns (2% vs. 6%).

View the complete report on the CDC web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/>.

SUMA Looking to Expand Information Distribution

SUMA, the Humanitarian Supply Management System, is an information management tool that helps disaster-stricken countries make order of the chaos often caused by uncoordinated humanitarian assistance. SUMA periodically publishes an electronic newsletter on its web site and would like to make it available to all readers of this newsletter. If you are interested in receiving a summary of this bulletin and other SUMA news by e-mail, please contact pedsuma@sol.racsa.co.cr. You can also read the SUMA newsletter online at www.disaster.info.desastres.net/SUMA/.



2001 Health Sector Disaster Reduction Activities Reviewed

In January 2002, senior staff from PAHO's Disaster Program and representatives of CIDA (Canada), SIDA (Sweden), DFID (U.K.) and AID/OFDA (U.S.) convened over a four-day period in Lima, Peru to review achievements and constraints during the past year. The meeting demonstrated a sustained commitment to building the disaster management capacity of the health sector in Latin America and the Caribbean.

This high-level international meeting reviewed sectoral disaster reduction activities and priorities in the Americas. Crosscutting issues, among them gender sensitivity, civil-military coordination and the projection of SUMA at the global level were reviewed.

The next meeting, scheduled for April 2003, is expected to play an increasing role in shaping external assistance for reducing disaster vulnerability and increasing health sector disaster preparedness.

CRID Web site Recognized in Costa Rica

Each week, La Nación, Costa Rica's largest daily newspaper, selects what it considers the top five web sites from around the world. In February, CRID's web site won second place. Criteria include content, organization and how user friendly the site is. Visit CRID at www.crid.or.cr to learn what's new and to search the database of more than 12,000 pieces of literature on all aspects of disaster reduction.

Electronic Resources

Nicaragua Teams with World Bank on Disaster Mitigation Project

In February, the Government of Nicaragua and the World Bank launched a US\$13.5 million disaster mitigation project that will provide tools to help the country better face the impact of disasters. The new National System for Prevention and Mitigation of Disasters (SNPMAD), established in 2001, will manage the project. SNPMAD has pulled together all national actors under the office of the Vice President. This approach ensures that all Nicaraguan agencies responsible for emergency response as well as sustainable development collaborate toward the common goal of reducing vulnerability to disasters.

www.Colorado.edu/hazards/

The Natural Hazards Center at the University of Colorado offers many online publications, including the *Natural Hazards Observer*, its bimonthly periodical and the peer-reviewed *Informer*. Also search the Natural Hazards Center's online Library Database.

www.geohaz.org/

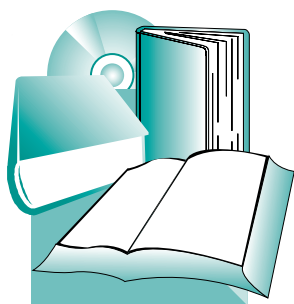
The Global Earthquake Safety Initiative (GESI) of GeoHazards International allows a comparison of the world's cities based on their earthquake risks. It reflects the consequences of the certain actions, such as the enforcement of building codes and the preparation and practice of emergency response plans, taken to manage risk.

www.disaster-central.com

A new service that hopes to become a comprehensive, web-based portal to educational resources in crisis, disaster, and emergency management. Disaster Central (DC) will feature current, selected, digital resources organized by topic.

www.isc.ac.uk

The International Seismological Centre (ISC) in the U.K. collects, analyzes and publishes global earthquake information. The Center prepares an online global seismic Bulletin that includes event locations and magnitudes.



Publications and Multimedia

PAHO Presents a New Disaster Publications Catalog

In recent years the growing number of publications, videos, CD-ROMs and slides published by PAHO on emergencies and disasters has complicated the task of compiling a complete list of what is available. For the time being, however, the challenge has been met with a new catalog of disaster publications, now available in a print or electronic version.

This catalog is a clear demonstration that the production of publications and training materials continues to be a core function of PAHO's Program on Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief. The content of many publications has been revised and many new titles have been added.

Without neglecting the traditional print medium, this catalog highlights the value added of electronic publications as complements to this body of material. All books are available in full text on the Internet, in HTML or PDF format. CD-ROMs, with their ease of use, low distribution cost and high storage capacity, are also featured. In 2001 alone, four new CDs were produced.

In order to consolidate PAHO's disaster information resources in one location, the catalog has special sections devoted to information products that make use of technology, including SUMA (the Humanitarian Supply Management System), the CRID (Regional Disaster Information Center), and the Virtual Health Library for Disasters. Also included is a description of many web sites PAHO maintains, sponsors or contributes to.

There are different ways to order and receive this material. The catalog provides the addresses (postal and e-mail) of all PAHO Disaster Offices (Washington, Barbados, Costa Rica and Ecuador) and all PAHO/WHO Country Offices in the Americas, and the PAHO's Publications Program.

To request a print copy of this catalog, contact disaster-publications@paho.org or write to the Editor of this Newsletter (see page 8). Consult the catalog online at www.paho.org/disasters.



Technical Guide Complements Video on Volcanos

A short technical guide is now available to accompany the new video on volcanoes *Health Planning for Volcanic Crises* (see the October issue of this newsletter). Both the video, and now the guide, focus on the principal health hazards of volcanic eruptions, together with the basic planning measures the health sector can and should take to reduce potential effects. The guide is intended to serve as reference material that can be consulted before, during or after viewing the program. The text of the guide has been modified and adapted from the original video script. Consult the guide on the Internet at www.paho.org/english/ped/volcano_guide.htm. Request print copies from disaster-publications@paho.org.



Disaster Guide for Laboratories and Blood Banks Now Available in English


This new publication, which stresses the importance of safeguarding the critical services of laboratories and blood banks from the adverse effects of disasters, was advertised in the October issue of the newsletter, when it was available only in Spanish. The publication, written for health authorities, laboratory directors and technicians and those working in blood banks, is now available in English online at www.paho.org/english/hsp/hse/laboratorios.htm. A limited number of print copies is also available.

Write to disaster-publications@paho.org or to the Editor of this Newsletter (see page 8).



Communities in Central America Embrace Disaster Preparedness

(from page 1)



capacity and creativity, but a willingness to take responsibility for decision making with regard to their collective security.

Modest monetary prizes were awarded to the three winning floats and the winners destined the prize money for an activity related to disaster prevention in their community. For example, the director of the municipal health center used the funds to overhaul a generator that had sat idle for three years when the hospital received the donation of a more powerful one. With their small prize of US\$350, the old generator (worth \$7,000) was repaired, transported and installed and now the health center has a backup power source.

The drama behind disasters

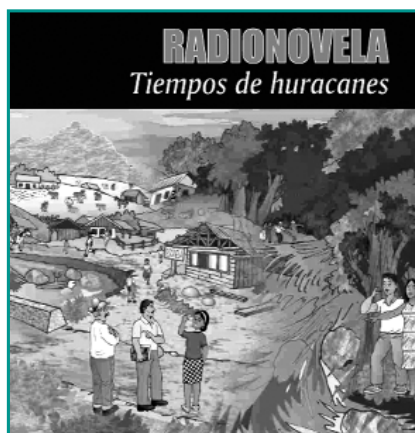
Aside from physical hazards, many at-risk communities face other obstacles when it comes to disaster preparedness and prevention: high rates of illiteracy and scarce access to basic technologies. Often the Internet is only vaguely understood and televisions are in short supply. In Central America, one solution was to produce a community-level radio soap opera.

PAHO has joined forces with CEPREDENAC, the International Organization for Migration

(IOM) and the ISDR to produce a four-part drama called "*Tiempos de huracanes*." The drama, which focuses on hurricanes and floods, presents segments on what can happen before, during and after these disasters. The story line contrasts the negative results of a lack of preparedness on the part of local communities with positive experiences. The drama serves as an educational tool about issues such as health, gender and migration in the disaster context. In Guatemala, they are considering adapting the script for the theatre.

The radio drama is slated to air beginning in April and is expected to receive broad acceptance for several reasons: the target audience in Central America is very receptive to this medium, a large number of local and national radio stations have agreed to widely broadcast it and the inter-agency nature of the initiative touches on many issues.

For information on either initiative, contact pedcor@sol.racsac.co.cr.



Newsletter survey...

(from page 1)

One section of the Newsletter is always devoted to new publications and materials. The majority of the featured material is published by PAHO. The just-released catalog of disaster publications (see page 6) is testament to the substantial investment of time and money put into the design, production and distribution of this body of work. In the last few years, electronic publishing has also been a focus, to the point that all books are simultaneously published in print and digital format (on the Internet and CD-ROM).

But the publishing cycle would not be complete without knowing if users are satisfied. We need feedback that allows us to improve the process.

Fifteen years ago, this newsletter shared the stage with few others. Today, the number of simi-

lar bulletins—print and electronic, free or by subscription—is overwhelming. The challenge is not to find information but to wade through all that is out there and receive just what is useful.

Given this level of saturation, we are asking our readers to tell us what is important to them. We will do this in stages, beginning with your opinion of this newsletter (later we will cover publications.) How many of you would like to receive the newsletter only electronically? How many would like broader coverage of national or local disaster activities in Latin America and the Caribbean?

By completing the enclosed survey you will help us to focus this newsletter and ensure that in of information overload, we are getting the fight information to the right people. Thank you for your help.

*Please take a moment
to complete the survey
and return it to the
PAHO Disaster Program
by mail to the postal
address on page 8.*



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.

D.10 Feachem, Richard G., Bradley, David J., Garelick, Hemda, Mara, D. Duncan. *Sanitation and Disease Health Aspects of Excreta and Wastewater Management*. World Bank, p. 28, s.f. (13383).

D.11 Handmer, John. Are Emergency Services Becoming Private?. In: *The Australian Journal of Emergency Management*. pp. 42-5, No. 3, Vol. 15. 2000. (13165)

D.12 Jiménez de León, Elizabeth. *Plan estratégico de modernización de establecimientos de salud: Guía de diseño y renovaciones*. Pan American Health Organization, Universidad Simón Bolívar, p. 8, 1999 (13798)

D.13 Venezuela. Ministerio de Salud y Desarrollo Social, MSDS. *Orientaciones sobre desastres*. MSDS. p. 16, Jul. 2000. (13840)

D.14 Phillips, Brenda D. *Los desastres y la mujeres: vulnerabilidad y capacidad*. s.n., p. 9, 2000. (13138)

D.15 Shoaf, Kimberly, Rottman, Steven J. Public Health Impact of Disaster. In: *The Australian Journal of Emergency Management*. pp. 58-62, No. 3, Vol. 15. 2000. (13168)

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