

DISASTERS



PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION IN THE AMERICAS



Issue No. 62

News and Information for the International Disaster Community

April 1995

Legislators Meet to Support Disaster Reduction



Photo:
PAHO/WHO

Many Ministries and national institutions in this Region have neither the legal authority nor budget to carry out disaster preparedness and reduction activities. The laws that exist are often incomplete; without high-level political support, the authority delegated to the disaster preparedness unit in a Ministry of Health, for example, is weak. Progress has been made toward remedying these problems: the work of the Latin American Parliament (PARLATINO), is an example of a regional political organization working for legislation in this area.

In late April the Honduran Congress hosted PARLATINO's working group on disaster reduction, made up of Latin American legislators, members of PARLATINO's Health Commission, and representatives from PAHO/WHO. This group met with members of the Health Ministry of Honduras and disaster experts to discuss ways to:

- Encourage national legislatures to adopt standards on disaster prevention and mitigation
- Support political consensus already reached among lawmakers in geographically vulnerable regions to implement programs and projects
- Promote legislation to provide the necessary financial backing for disaster reduction activities
- Stimulate the creation of working groups or commissions charged with monitoring disaster reduction programs and their results, keeping disaster reduction issues visible in legislatures,

(cont. on pg. 7)

News from PAHO/WHO	2
Other Organizations	3
Member Countries	4
Review of Publications	6
Upcoming Meetings	7
Selected Bibliography	8
Supplement No. 1 on Disaster Information on the Internet	15

Editorial

UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination Teams—Pros and Cons

A weak link not often addressed in disaster management is that between damage assessment and coordination of external response. The problem is most acute in "complex disasters" which are characterized either by the absence of a functioning national government or, worse, by the presence of a government directly responsible for the tragedy.

During the last few years, the international community has promoted United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) Teams—experts who can be deployed very quickly by donor governments to disaster sites. This approach to carrying out rapid assessment and coordinating external relief efforts provides a potential solution in the administrative vacuum or

chaos of some emergency situations, such as Rwanda or Somalia. However, it is potentially counterproductive if transposed to other disaster situations in developing countries, especially those that are advanced in their efforts toward self-reliance in disaster situations.

From a Latin American or Caribbean perspective, international UNDAC teams present both advantages and disadvantages in the following areas:

- *Objectivity and credibility of the information:* A relief agency or donor country will tend to trust "their people in the field". Donor participation will add credibility to the assessment and coordination process and thus increase their potential support.

(cont. on pg. 7)

News from PAHO/WHO

H.E.L.P. 95

Health Emergencies in Large Populations (H.E.L.P. 95) is a course intended for health professionals who may be called upon to deal with disaster situations. This year the course will take place at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland (USA) from 10 to 28 July with the sponsorship of the International Committee of the Red Cross and PAHO/WHO. The course will cover planning, nutrition, environmental health, communicable disease, health services, epidemiology and international humanitarian law. Applications should be sent as soon as possible to the International Committee of the Red Cross Medical Division, H.E.L.P. 95-JHU, 19, avenue

de la Paix, 1202, Geneva, Switzerland, Tel: (41-22) 730 2810; Fax (41-22) 733-2057. □

Disaster Information Network Launched

A PAHO/NASA (U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration) regional electronic communications network will soon be launched in Central America. The pilot network will link health sector professionals, civil defense workers, legislators, and others involved in disaster management both among themselves and across borders. See the Supplement to this issue for more details. □

Three new publications from PAHO/WHO....



Guidelines for Assessing Disaster Preparedness in the Health Sector (available in English and Spanish), 28 pp.

This booklet provides guidelines for evaluating the most important aspects of disaster preparedness in the health sector. It includes checklists on coordination and technical capacity for mass casualty management, epidemiology, sanitation, and temporary settlements. It also addresses national health policy for disaster issues. Potential sources of information for those doing the assessment are included, and the entire process is illustrated in flow charts.

Establishing a Mass Casualty Management System (available in English only), 64 pp.

When an accident or disaster involving large numbers of casualties occurs in a remote area or country which has only limited health care resources, good coordination of the available emergency personnel and facilities is essential to save lives. This publication describes the roles of emergency personnel in such a situation, the establishment of advance medical posts at the incident site, triage, patient stabilization, transport and evacuation, communications, and hospital reception of the injured. It will guide disaster managers and health care professionals to establish or review their own mass casualty management system.

Manual para Simulacros Hospitalarios de Emergencia (available in Spanish only) 64 pp.

Conducting emergency simulations is central to developing and maintaining any hospital emergency plan. This manual describes general responsibilities of the hospital emergency committee and its role in directing simulations for different emergency scenarios. Inter-institutional coordination, training, communication, and community involvement are addressed as are specific steps to carry out the simulation such as preparing script, maintaining routine functions of the hospital during the simulation, and moulage techniques. The manual is based on hospital simulations in Central and South America and is meant to be adapted to a variety of scenarios and needs.

A limited number of these and other publications are available free of charge. Please write the Editor of this Newsletter to obtain copies in English, or the Regional Disaster Documentation Center for Spanish copies: Apartado 3745, San José 1000, Costa Rica; Fax: (506) 231-5973; Internet: cddcor@paho.org.

Other Organizations

Reminder . . . Canada to Host International Conference on Industrial Accidents

The Major Industrial Accidents Council of Canada (MIACC) announces its fifth international conference. The 1995 Conference, taking place 31 October-3 November 1995 in Toronto, will provide a forum to address all aspects and technology developments in the fields of prevention, preparedness and response to major industrial accidents involving hazardous substances. A two-day exhibition of the newest products and services will follow the conference. Post-conference courses on 3 November will present practical approaches to industrial safety.

For details on submitting papers or registering, please contact: MIACC, 265 Carling Avenue, Suite 600, Ottawa, Ontario K1S 2E1, Canada; Tel: (613) 232-4435; Fax: (613) 232-4915. □

International Conference for Fire Chiefs

The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) will have its annual conference in Louisville, Kentucky, from 2 to 9 September 1995. The 1994 Conference featured one day of seminars tailored especially for firefighters from Spanish-speaking countries, allowing participants from Argentina, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Spanish-speaking communities in the U.S. to exchange experiences. To encourage similar activities at the September conference, the editors of *Bombero Internacional*, the Spanish-language newsletter of Dade County's Fire and Rescue Department, would like to hear from anyone interested in attending, or wanting IAFC membership information. Please contact *Bombero Internacional*, Metro Dade Fire Dept., 6000 SW 87 Ave., Miami, Florida 33173-1698, USA; Fax (305) 596-8933. □

Women and Children... the Key to Disaster Prevention

The International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction (to be celebrated this year on 11 October) raises public awareness that "disaster prevention is better than the cure". The theme for this year's IDNDR day is "Women and Children—Key to Prevention".

The IDNDR secretariat asks that national IDNDR Committees, NGOs, institutions, Governments, and international agencies send examples of women and/or children who play a proactive role in building a "culture of disaster prevention," making a long-term difference in the way communities prevent, mitigate, or prepare for disasters. Contributions, in the form of reports,

seminar results, videos, posters, and other materials, will be presented in the Summer issue of *STOP Disasters*, the IDNDR magazine.

Debates, round table discussions, and interviews on the theme of women and/or children playing key roles in disaster prevention are planned for IDNDR Day. These discussions will be publicized as part of a "Global Round Table" by the secretariat. Please send details of any planned activities to the IDNDR secretariat by 1 September. To contribute materials or get more information on activities, contact the IDNDR Secretariat, DHA, Palais des Nations CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland; Tel: (4122) 798-6895; Fax: (4122) 733-8695, or the Regional Office of the IDNDR, Apdo. 3745-1000, San José, Costa Rica; Fax: (506) 257-2139. □



Member Countries

Andean Countries Exchange Expertise

An important item on the agenda at last year's Inter-American Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, held in Cartagena, Colombia, was to encourage greater "horizontal" interaction between disaster experts in countries. In the past year Bolivia has pursued this course by signing bilateral agreements with Colombia, Peru, and Venezuela on disaster prevention and preparedness. The Bolivian Civil Defense Agency and Ministries of Health and Defense are exchanging expertise and training in disaster medicine, hospital preparedness, and airport safety with counterparts in these three countries. □

Preparing for Aviation Emergencies in the Caribbean

An important consideration in aviation emergencies in the Caribbean is that many of the smallest countries in the area have only one hospital where victims from air accidents can be treated. In a conference held recently in Barbados, it was recognized that mass casualties could only be treated if all local emergency resources were efficiently utilized. In areas where limited treatment resources exist, strengthening medical stabilization in the field is a priority since only a limited number of patients can be transferred to the hospital. The casualties who can be monitored in the field and for whom there is no specialist available in the country would remain at the accident site for overseas transfer.

Mass casualties and other issues will be addressed at the First Annual Caribbean Regional Conference on Aviation Emergencies and Disaster Preparedness from 16 to 18 May 1995, being hosted by the Government of St. Lucia. The Conference is being cosponsored by the International Civil Aviation Organization, the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency and Federal Aviation Administration, and other international and regional public and private agencies. This conference is very timely as most Eastern Caribbean Disaster Airport Plans need to be updated and tested.

For additional information on the Conference, please contact Mr. Herald Wilson, Deputy

General Manager, St. Lucia Air and Sea Ports Authority, Tel: (809) 452-2893, or Mr. Timothy James, National Disaster Coordinator, St. Lucia, Tel: (809) 452-3802. □

Chile: Journalists Specialize in Disaster Issues

In Chile, the National Emergency Office of the Ministry of Interior (ONEMI) inaugurated training for journalists specializing in civil protection issues with the course "Public Information in Disaster Situations". The training, designed by journalists working with ONEMI, takes place at the University of Chile. For more information on this initiative, contact Dr. Alberto Maturana, Director, ONEMI, Ministry of the Interior, Clasf. 1-C, Correo 25, Santiago, Chile; Fax: (562) 689-4094. □

Regional UNDAC Team Formed

Three years ago, the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) established the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) Team. UNDAC Teams, made up of emergency management experts, can be mobilized within hours to work with local authorities to assess damage and coordinate relief efforts at a disaster site. Until now, the Team has been made up of experts from European donor countries, but the first Regional UNDAC Team is now being formed with the support of UN/DHA and the United Nations Development Program. The Regional Team will have 25 disaster experts from six Latin American countries (Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela) detailed by their Governments to conduct damage assessment and relief coordination at disaster sites in Latin America. The first training course for these experts will be held from 5 to 10 June in Quito, with financial support from Canada.

The two objectives for establishing a Regional UNDAC Team are to strengthen the regional capacity to react to and manage international disaster response resources (whether human or financial), and to provide a link between the national and regional experiences and the UN and international response system.

(cont. on pg. 5)

For more information on the Latin American UNDAC Team, please contact Mr. Fabrizio Gentiloni, Relief Coordination Branch, UN/DHA, Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland; Fax: (41-22) 917 0023; Tel: (41-22) 917-1234. □

Peru: Hospitals to Establish Civil Defense Committees

On March 28, the Ministry of Health of Peru signed a Resolution requiring all the nation's hospitals to establish Hospital Civil Defense Committees. This legislation represents a major achievement for health authorities who have worked for years to institutionalize disaster preparedness in Peruvian hospitals. The Resolution calls for the creation of Committees composed of a hospital's Director and Chiefs of the Emergency, Medical, Surgery, Nursing, Administrative, Maintenance and Transportation Departments. The Committees' mandate is to develop emergency plans for hospitals, oversee hospital disaster preparedness activities, ensure that all staff receive training, and coordinate with provincial or district Civil Defense Committees.

For more information on this initiative, please contact Dr. Ciro Ugarte, Director General, Unidad de Preparativos Contra Desastres, Ministerio de

Salud, 6 de Agosto 424, Lima 11, Peru; Fax: (511) 433-0690. □

Forum on Community Preparedness for Disasters

What are the best tools and methods for preventing disasters in vulnerable communities? What motivates a community to establish an emergency committee and work to reduce local hazards? How do national policies influence community preparedness?

These questions were discussed by 70 representatives from public institutions, community organizations, NGOs, and international organizations at the "International Forum on Disaster Mitigation in Communities" in Costa Rica in early April. The Forum was backed by the Regional Office of the IDNDR, PAHO/WHO, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, CEPREDENAC, Médecins sans Frontières, USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, and the Costa Rican National Emergency Commission. The results of the Meeting will be distributed in support of this year's IDNDR Day and can be obtained by writing the Regional Office of the IDNDR, Apdo. 3745-1000, San José, Costa Rica, Fax: (506) 257-2139. □



Gets Presidential Endorsement in Panama

Panama's President and Minister of Foreign Affairs signed a Decree in January 1995 that establishes a national SUMA Team. Decree No. 21 designates representatives from the Ministry of Health and Social Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Red Cross, and Panama's National System of Civil Protection as team members. They will ensure that relief supply management software is implemented to classify and inventory relief supplies in case of disaster.

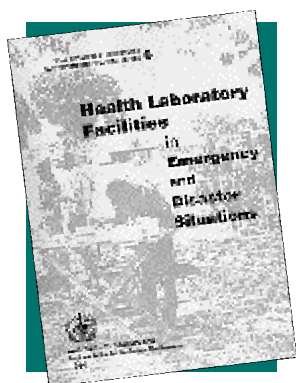
This is the first time that a SUMA Team has been created at the national level in the Region, and it was made possible thanks to the high level of enthusiasm and interest shown by Panamanian authorities involved in SUMA as well as the assistance of the PAHO/WHO Representation in Panama.

Honduras has also incorporated SUMA into its national emergency plan, and it will be activated in case of disaster. □

Review of Publications

The books referred to in this section have been abstracted from review copies sent to the Editor of this Newsletter.

Except where noted otherwise, none of the books is available from PAHO. The publisher and the list price (when available) are included for readers who are interested in obtaining the books.



Health Laboratory Facilities in Emergency and Disaster Situations (WHO Regional Publications, Eastern Mediterranean Series No.6) WHO, Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, 1994, 168 pp. (Available for \$11.25 plus shipping costs from the Distribution and Sales Office, WHO/EMRO, P.O. Box 1517, Alexandria 21511, Egypt).

In disaster and emergency situations, rapid assessment of medical conditions and risk for outbreak of disease in the affected population is critical. Laboratory facilities required for disease surveillance in such circumstances often face serious constraints: they have to operate in remote areas, lack reagents, basic equipment, and a dependable power source, and perform with insufficient staff. This book provides practical guidelines for setting up a laboratory when resources are limited. It recommends diagnostic tests for communicable and infectious diseases associated with disaster conditions. It illustrates various field laboratory designs and types of equipment most appropriate for field use, and reviews laboratory safety techniques. Authorities formulating national plans for emergency health services and health professionals working in disaster situations will find the book useful. □

Natural Hazards in the Caribbean, edited by Rafi Ahmad, *The Journal of the Geological Society of Jamaica*, 108 pp. Special Issue No. 12, 1992. (Available in English from the Geological Society of Jamaica, c/o Dept. of Geology, University of the West Indies, Mona, Kingston 7, Jamaica.)

Most of the Caribbean islands share geologic and hydrologic hazards. Research on natural hazards and the environment particular to this region was the topic of the International Conference on Recent Advances in Caribbean Geology held in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1988. The editors of the *Journal of the Geological Society of Jamaica* have collected the Conference papers in a special issue.

Some of the topics covered are: seismicity in the Greater and Lesser Antilles, volcanic geology and hazards in the eastern Caribbean, and landslides triggered by Hurricane Gilbert in Jamaica. One section of the monograph addresses man's intervention in the environment, focusing on environmental degradation in watersheds in Jamaica,

and deep-well disposal in the Bahamas. The section on disaster preparedness includes advances in Jamaica's flood warning systems and progress in the same country in retrofitting housing. □

Catástrofes en Chile: 1541-1992 (Catastrophes in Chile) by Rosa Urrutia de Hazbun and Carlos Lanza Lazcano, Santiago, Chile: Editorial La Noria, 1993, 440 pp., 15 maps. (Available in Spanish from Editorial La Nora, Huérfanos 886, Of. 917, Santiago, Chile; Fax: 562-606-4768.)

Beginning with a fire in Santiago in 1541—the first disaster recorded after the arrival of the Spanish—the book *Catástrofes en Chile* chronicles 550 years of disasters in Chile. It traces the country's history of drought, famine, floods, volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes, and also includes a record of epidemics, including that of AIDS today. The authors explore the organization of response to these events over the centuries, and analyze the social, economic, and environmental costs of these events. □

Desastres y Sociedad en America Latina: Directorio de investigadores, instituciones y proyectos (Disasters and Society in Latin America: Directory of researchers, institutions, and projects), La RED, San José, Costa Rica, 1994, 146 pp. (Available in Spanish from the Regional Disaster Documentation Center, Apdo. Postal 3745, San José, 1000, Costa Rica.)

Want to know who's who in disaster management in Latin America? A recently published directory lists individuals and institutes in 15 countries in the Americas doing research on a wide range of disaster related topics. The directory also catalogues some 70 research projects underway or recently completed on a broad spectrum of issues, describing the objectives, financing, and responsible parties. The Directory was compiled by La Red (The Network of Social Studies on Disaster Prevention in Latin America), with CEPREDENAC (the Coordinating Center for Disaster Prevention in Central America), the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), and the Regional Disaster Documentation Center in San José, Costa Rica. □



UNDAC Teams *(from pg. 1)*

- *Experience:* International experts traveling from disaster to disaster acquire experience that is difficult to match at the national level—at least, in theory. In the real world, however, experienced UNDAC team members are few and not always available at very short notice. As a result, outside “experts” are sometimes far less knowledgeable and prepared than their local partners. They learn on the job, and their authority may be derived more from their influence on relief funds allocation than from their knowledge, experience, or judgement. This international experience should also be gained by those disaster managers actually living in disaster-prone countries.

- *Assessment standards:* Damage assessment requires knowledge of conditions before the disaster occurs. Good assessment is culturally sensitive. Identical standards cannot be used to assess emergency-related health needs in Bosnia, Colombia, or Sudan.

- *Knowledge of local power structures:* Coordination of relief activities requires knowledge of the local players as well as having the authority to coordinate. Both are best found locally.

Using UNDAC teams is not always in line with the priorities and needs of this Region. The forthcoming Regional UNDAC course organized for

six countries in Latin America (see page 4), is a most positive step toward placing disaster management responsibilities where they belong and developing skills where they are needed: at the national level.

The real moment of truth will come in mobilizing the Regional UNDAC Team. Will the “international” component of the Team consist of experts from neighboring countries who share a similar culture and exposure to disasters? Will these team members only meet the information needs of the international community or will they also be a valuable resource and asset for national disaster coordinators?

The countries of the Region must ensure that the UNDAC initiative contributes to regional integration and self-reliance by developing skills at the national level to improve preparedness for future disasters. □

Legislators Meet *(from pg. 1)*

and encouraging research on how effective local disaster reduction programs are.

Recommendations made by the working group will be presented to the Central American Parliament and other subregional organizations, with the goal of broadening legislation on disaster reduction programs. □

Upcoming Meetings

May

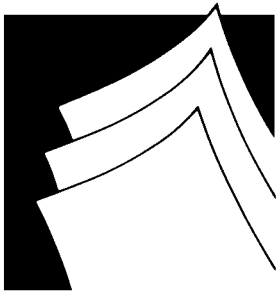
The International Conference on Natural Disasters will be held from 29 May to 1 June in Huaraz, Peru. Sponsored by the IDNDR Committee of Peru, National Institute of Civil Defense, and Peruvian Geophysical Institute, it will address present capacity of countries to deal with natural disasters. Contact: Comité Organizador de la Conferencia Internacional de Huaraz, Esq. Calles 1 y 21, Urb. Córpac, San Isidro, Lima 27, Peru; Tel: (511) 441-3277; Fax: (511) 441-3349.

June

“Managing Donated Goods and Services”, a conference sponsored by the Central United States Earthquake Consortium (CUSEC), American Red Cross, FEMA, and others, will take place 14-16 June, in Newton, Massachusetts, U.S.A. It aims to develop a network for managing donated goods and provide ways to match sources with needs following disasters. Contact: CUSEC, Donations Conference, 2630 East Holmes Rd., Memphis, Tenn. 38118-8001, USA; Tel: (800)-824-5817; Fax: (901) 345-0998.

July/September

Cranfield University’s Disaster Preparedness Center in conjunction with the Oxford Centre for Disaster Studies are mounting the eighth annual Disaster Management Course from 31 July-25 August in Faringdon, Oxfordshire, U.K. It will be followed by a Training for Trainers Course from 28 August to 8 September. Contact: Director, Cranfield Disaster Preparedness Centre, Cranfield Univ., RMCS, Shrivenham, Swindon SN6 8LA, United Kingdom; Tel: (0044) 01793-785287; Fax: (0044) 01793-782179.



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.

- P.3** Staes, Catherine, et al., "Deaths due to flash floods in Puerto Rico, January 1992: Implications for prevention," *International Journal of Epidemiology*, Vol. 23, No. 6, pp. 968-975, 1994.
- P.4** Petri, Roland W., et al., "The effect of prehospital transport time on the mortality from traumatic injury," *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 24-29, 1995.
- P.5** Ahmad, R., et al., "The impact of slope movements on a rural community: Lessons from Jamaica," *Natural Disasters: Protecting Vulnerable Communities*, Proceedings of the Conference held in London, 13-15 October 1993, pp. 447-460.
- P.6** Staffa, Eugene I., "The use of Inmarsat in disaster relief and emergency assistance operations," presented at the International Conference on Disasters and Emergency Communications, Tampere, 1991.
- P.7** Rubin, Carol H. et al., "Evaluating a fluorosis hazard after a volcanic eruption [Mount Hudson, Chile]," *Archives of Environmental Health*, Vol. 49, No. 5, pp. 395-401, 1994.
- P.8** Cernea, Michael M., "Bridging the research divide: Studying refugees and development oustees," The World Bank, Environmental Department publication, 1994.

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 Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance of the U.S. Agency for International Development (OFDA/AID).

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: 202-861-6096
Fax: 202-775-4578
Internet: disaster@paho.org

April 1995

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