Disasters



Preparedness and Mitigation in the Americas

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Building Partnerships Within and Among Organizations

In a fast changing world, new risks and threats—natural and manmade—are constantly surfacing. The Pan American Health Organization is one of many agencies reexamining some of the old paradigms governing disaster and risk reduction.



The Willard Hotel in Washington, D.C., site of the First International Sanitary Convention in 1902—a history-making event marked by a community of nations joining forces on a permanent basis to deal with health

ast December, the Pan American Health Organization marked the 100th anniversary of the date when representatives of 11 countries gathered to stem the spread of pestilence and disease that engulfed the Americas at the turn of the last century. Today, the beginning of

PAHO's second century also coincides with new leadership. In many areas, including disaster and risk reduction, Dr. Mirta Roses Periago and her team are equipping the Organization to respond to changing needs. The result has been improved synergy among PAHO's technical areas as the Organization seeks to build one cohesive team.

PAHO is broadening its coordination function—enlisting support from other PAHO units and other health institutions to help countries develop their own capacity to

prepare for disasters, reduce vulnerability and respond better with local means. Several PAHO areas have demonstrated their commitment to this mission: the Area on Sustainable Development and

(continued on page 7)

First English Language LEADERS Course



fter four successful LIDERES courses in Spanish, the first English-language course took place in St. Ann, Jamaica, 10 – 21 February 2003.

LEADERS is an excellent forum to discuss different aspects of development and disasters, especially topics such as preparedness for terrorist incidents, designing interventions, managing crises and other post-disaster issues.

This course was unique in that it joined not only participants from the Western Hemisphere with colleagues from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Pacific. This multiregional characteristic generated a broader view of different topics and enhanced the relations among regions.

LEADERS will continue to be offered in Spanish and WHO plans to develop a version of the English course adapted to other regions, starting with Asia.

The next course in Spanish will be held in México from 20-31 October 2003.

For more information, visit the website at www.disaster-info/LIDERES.





Pan American
Health Organization
Regional Office of the
World Health Organization

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News from PAHO/WHO

News from PAHO/WHO

Reducing the impact of disasters on health in the Americas requires the specialized expertise of a wide range of individuals and organizations. The Pan American Health Organization has decentralized much of its technical cooperation in disasters to be closer to the health sector it serves and to other organizations working in the field. The map below shows the functional areas that make up PAHO's work in disaster reduction.

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2003 Clarence H. Moore Award for Voluntary Service

o you know of an NGO who has made an outstanding contribution to public health and disasters? Nominate them for the Clarence Moore Award for Voluntary Service. Visit the Pan American Health and Education Foundation's website at www.paho.org/english/pahef/awards.htm.

Other Organizations

Other Organizations

SUMA Website and Software Get a Facelift



SUMA's updated website offers information in four languages. Download SUMA software, get in touch with SUMA experts in other countries, visit the photo gallery and read the latest news.

UMA's website is more than just a tool to promote SUMA and inform the public about services and activities. Anyone, anywhere can download the software, manuals and other training materials from the site at no charge. A recent update has made the site more interactive, including a link for logistics experts to join an "e-discussion group" and a form to subscribe to SUMA and PAHO disaster newsletters.

The next phase of updating will focus on additional user interaction, allowing SUMA teams to upload reports, photos and graphics during emergency operations. This material will also be integrated into an on-site disaster database. Additional mirror sites will also be created in different parts of the Americas to improve speed and access.

In the last six weeks of 2002, the redesigned SUMA web site received 650 visitors, mainly from the U.S., Canada and Latin America, although the number of visitors from other parts of the world is growing daily.

The new release 5.2 of SUMA software was launched in October 2002 and is available on the website and on CD-ROM. The updating process represented several years of effort to capture and incorporate users' experiences and needs and reflects substantial technical improvements to help users better manage humanitarian donations in disaster situations. Contact funsuma@racsa.co.cr

Other Newsletters on Disasters

Read more about emergency preparedness, risk reduction and humanitarian response in:

- Emergency Preparedness and Response Highlights, a periodic electronic newsletter published by WHO's Department of Emergency and Humanitarian Action, is available on their web site at www.who.int/disasters (click on Newsletter at the bottom of the page). To be notified by e-mail when a new issue is up on the site, write to eha@who.int.
- ISDR Highlights, a forum to share ideas and major developments in the field of disaster reduction, increase public awareness, and expand risk reduction networks is published bimonthly by the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. Available online at www.unisdr.org/unisdr/highlights2003.htm.
- The Sphere Newsletter publishes a quarterly e-mail news bulletin with information related to project activities. The Sphere Project aims to improve the quality of assistance provided to people affected by disasters and to enhance accountability of the humanitarian system in disaster response. The project has developed a Humanitarian Charter and a set of universal minimum standards in core areas of humanitarian assistance. To subscribe, write to lyris@Lyris.ifrc.org. Type "subscribe sphere-newsletter-english" in the subject field.

Inter-Agency Task Force Reviews Disaster Reduction Strategies

Representatives of 23 institutions members of the IATF on Disaster Reduction (see complete list at www.unisdr.org) and 29 observer institutions met recently in Geneva to review an update of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action and follow up on the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Four IATF work groups presented their reports and certain concrete results were acknowledged, such as the International Research Center on the El Niño Phenomenon (CIIFEN) in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

The UN General Assembly and many countries are placing increasing demands on the ISDR and the IATF, at a time when contributions and resources to carry out programs remain modest. This means that tasks must be prioritized and the ISDR was asked to revise the 2004-05 workplan. A second International Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction is scheduled for January 2005 to review progress achieved in implementing the Yokohama Strategy approved by the U.N. in 1994.

Member Countries

British Virgin Islands: An Example in Preparedness

mall island developing states are extremely vulnerable to disasters. However, not all island governments respond with the same level of investment, leaving populations vulnerable to the effects of natural disasters. This is not the case in the British Virgin Islands. Twenty years ago, the government of the British Virgin Islands assigned a budget of US\$3000 to disaster preparedness. Today, the money allocated for that purpuse has increased to \$500,800. More than \$5.5million have been set aside in a national disaster relief

fund. In addition, a small cadre of trained professionals has been assigned the task of addressing disaster management issues.

Accomplishments in the field of disasters include public awareness, coordination and disaster planning, telecommunications for emergencies, an emergency shelter network and community preparedness, reduced hurricane damage, integrated disaster management and development planning, disaster legislation, and building of local capacity.

BVI's disaster management program has come to be recognized as a model for small

island states in the Caribbean region and around the world. Their hope is to strengthen the culture of disaster awareness and improve capacity to address all aspects of the disaster cycle, benefitting not only the BVI, but improving the pool of talent for the region as a whole.

For more information on this program, please contact Sharleen Dabreo at e-mail: bviddm@surfbvi.com, or visit their website at www.bviodp.org.

Ecuador Examines Impact and Response to Recent Volcanic Eruptions



Cuador is one of the Western Hemisphere countries with the highest number of active volcanoes. In the last several years, the Tungurahua, Pichincha and Reventador volcanoes have been quite active, affecting a number of cities and provinces in this country of 13 million. Although health

tematic fashion
In March, Ecuador's Ministry of Public
Health and PAHO/WHO brought

and water authorities have stepped up

their emergency response planning, the

country had not recorded or preserved the

lessons learned from these events in a sys-

together health sector representatives from the most affected provinces, other public sector organizations, including the civil defense, mayors and community leaders, NGOs and international agencies in a workshop on the lessons learned regarding the impact and response of the health sector to recent volcanic eruptions. In addition to conferences, work groups discussed the effects on health services and water and sanitation systems, epidemiological surveillance following volcanic eruptions and working relationships between agencies. One of the panel discussions focused on the role the media can play in risk reduction by informing and educating the public during volcanic emergencies.

The workshop's important recommendations included urging Ecuador to establish a national policy on risk management at all levels of the country; making risk management a cross-cutting issue in all health sector programs and services; incorporating risk reduction as a strategy in national development plans and creating a national disaster prevention culture in institutions and communities alike. More on the web at www.disaster-info.net/PED-Sudamerica/. For more information write to asantand@ecu.ops-oms.org.

More about volcanoes

Who are you, Mr. Volcano? is the English translation of the ISDR and PAHO pamphlet for at-risk populations living close to volcanoes. In easy-to-understand language, suitable for



all age groups, it offers safety measures to be taken before and during an eruption. Online at www.disasterinfo.net/PED-Sudamerica/volcano.htm or request print copies (Spanish only) from CRID (see page 8).

Don't forget PAHO's video on Health Planning for a Volcanic Crisis, a 36-minute presentation (in English and Spanish) on the principal health risks posed by volcanic eruptions and basic steps the health sector should take to reduce potential damage. View a clip of the video or download the guide at www.paho.org/English/PED/volcano.htm. Order a VHS copy from disaster-publications@paho.org.

PAHOWHO





Ecuador Plans Project to Address Refugee Health



uring a three-year period, between January 2000 and the end of 2002, 10,740 Colombians sought refugee status when they crossed the border into Ecuador. Of these petitions, 3,403 were accepted. In just the first two months of 2003, Ecuador has received 2,847 petitions for refugee status, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. The Ministry of Health is set to begin a project to address the impact of this influx of refugees on the local health delivery system.

The project will help to set up emergency operations centers in

the affected provinces, improve health and hygiene conditions in shelters and among border populations in close contact with refugees and strengthen surveillance and health information systems.

Rapid response teams will be trained in a number of areas: the SUMA system methodology; geographical information systems; shelter management; hospital disaster planning, including simulation exercises and water quality control.

For more information contact Dr. Caroline Chang: cchang@ecu.ops-oms.org ecu.ops-oms.org or Eduardo Ortiz: ecu.ops-oms.org.

Disaster Congress Set for November in Cuba

Cuba will host the VI International Congress on Disasters in November, bringing together global experts to exchange knowledge and perspectives on risk reduction and to foster bilateral and multilateral technical cooperation programs and projects.

The Congress will cover all types of disasters—natural and manmade—including toxic substances, chemical and radiological accidents and epidemics. Papers or abstracts must be submitted prior to 30 July 2003. For more information, contact Jose Llanes at the National Disaster Office: ond@infomed.sld.cu or visit the Congress web site at www.loseventos.cu/desastres/2003.

Caribbean Reviews and Updates Environmental Health Contingency Guidelines



PAHO/WHO, A. Waak

ften, the environmental impact is the most severe, yet least visible consequence of a natural disaster. A new tool to help disaster managers deal with these effects is now available: the recently drafted Manual for Environmental Health Contingency Planning and Rapid Needs Assessment for Floods in the Caribbean. This manual, which updated an earlier version on environmental contingency planning prior to disasters, now includes important information to help the environmental health sector quickly assess post-disaster needs. Twenty-seven thematic experts, not only from Caribbean countries but also from several PAHO/WHO technical areas, participated in a workshop to examine the manual's contents and provide input. They concluded it was solid and practical tool and recommended simplifying the manual to make it more user-friendly. The Caribbean Environmental Health Institute (CEHI) will use these recommendations to update the guidelines and the review group will review final drafts before publication.

The environmental health contingency plan that is part of the publication should become an integral part of Caribbean health sector disaster plans. For more information, contact Ivan Alert at alertiva@cpc.paho.org.

Publications and Multimedia





Non-Structural Vulnerability Studies in Hospitals in Honduras



ospitals can fail for many reasons. In normal times, the failure of basic hospital services such as water or electricity due to improper maintenance is just a likely to cripple the facility as the occurrence of natural disaster. Hospital administrators understand this and have been strong proponents of guaranteeing that basic services continue functioning in their facilities in emergency situations, when they are most needed.

Hospital emergency committees have been important players in identifying the nonstructural elements in their facilities that make them vulnerable and the proper corrective measures to reduce this vulnerability. A good example of this is the Mario Catarino Rivas Hospital in Honduras, where in little more than two years, an active hospital emergency committee has helped to correct problems related to the provision of basic services. The

national health authorities in Honduras have taken note of this success story, crediting the coordinated hospital network for identifying and proposing solutions to their own problems.

In addition to the Rivas hospital, another important hospital in Honduras, the Hospital Escuela, has carried out a vulnerability study of non-structural elements. The results of these studies are available in print version (Spanish only) and on CD-ROM from the CRID (see page 8). The success of these studies has motivated health authorities in Honduras to conduct three more studies, which will also look at how medical equipment might be expected to function in the aftermath of a disaster. For more information contact Victor Rojas at rojasy@hon.ops-oms.org.



The photo on the cover of the CD-ROM containing the hospital vulnerability studies in Honduras was taken at the Mario Catarino Hospital during the vulnerability analysis of the hospital's nonstructural elements, such as the costly equipment pictured.

Coming soon!

The 2003 version
of the Health
Library for
Disasters will be
out in May. More
information about
this virtual library
will be available in
the next issue of

the Newsletter.

Environmental Health in Emergencies and Disasters- A Practical Guide



his WHO-edited publication distills what is known about environmental health during an emergency or disaster. It draws on results from the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, and on experience with sustainable development. It is intended for practitioners, as well as for policy makers and researchers, and thus covers both general and technical aspects of environmental health.

The publication is divided in two parts. The first part is a conceptual framework that covers the entire disaster-management cycle, from preparedness and warning, to recovery and prevention, and is presented for understanding environmental health issues in the context of disaster management. The second part is a detailed compendium of best practices and strategies for risk reduction and response in the

fields of shelter and emergency settlements; water supply; sanitation; food safety; vector and pest control; control of communicable diseases and prevention of epidemics; chemical incidents; radiation emergencies; mortuary service and handling of the dead; health promotion and community participation; and human resources.

A full-text version of this publication will be included in the next edition of the Health Library for Disasters. Currently, WHO has an electronic version on their website at www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/Documents/emergencies/EHemergencies.htm. For information on ordering print copies, write to bookorders@who.int.

Environmental Health and the Pan American Center for Sanitary Engineering and Environmental Sciences (CEPIS) have been key to the progress achieved in disaster mitigation in water and sanitation systems. Disaster mitigation in hospitals and health facilities is now a technical cooperation component of the Area on Technology and



Health Services Delivery.
Other key players include PAHO's units on health technologies and mental health. In

addition, several country offices have earmarked special funds for emergency preparedness and disaster relief.

Health sector disaster programs in Latin America and the Caribbean are finding themselves in a similar position. While they undoubtedly require backing from the decision-making level of the Ministry of Health, they must also seek ways to leverage support and expertise from other departments in the Ministry or other institutions in the health sector.

National health sector disaster programs are reaching maturity; a number of them have been in existence for more than 15 years. Some have developed a remarkable



capacity to face new challenges, but all are struggling to deal with opposing forces: the need for a strong central

operational authority to respond to disasters vs. the general tendency among governments to decentralize; high public expectations for the government to improve its capacity to mobilize the country and its institutions quickly in disaster situations while at the same time calling on government to reduce significantly its budget and staff; the need for increased coordination in an environment in which there is an overwhelming amount of information sources and a growing number of organizations working in the disaster arena; and the new order's powerful requirement to delegate traditional public sector tasks to other entities, either through privatization or the transfer of mandates and responsibilities.

In this environment, national disaster programs are likely to receive a shrinking percentage of their funds from the traditional central level. The disaster programs of the 21st century must seek to pool resources with other units in the Ministry or increase their networking capacity and ability to attract financial and other resources from external sources. The time honored top-down approach is no longer the formula. It must be complemented by, and in some cases, supplanted by strong horizontal partnerships. The creation of national health disaster preparedness and mitigation councils or committees at the country level, comprised of many health sector actors, is one way for health disaster programs to mobilize support and drive change in a field that is no longer a oneperson or even a one-institution show.

Last September, PAHO's Member States approved disaster management as one of the Organization's eight priority areas. Reducing the impact of emergencies and disasters on health has also been identified as one of the sector's eleven across-theboard Essential Public Health Functions. These commitments provide an overarching framework for PAHO technical cooperation in disasters, and coupled with the restructuring of the Organization, offer new opportunities to better face regional challenges in the field of vulnerability and risk reduction. However, to successfully respond to the countries' needs, the Organization will have to continue developing its own networking capacity, identify additional financial, political, technological and other support and further engage the specialized

expertise of its other technical areas. The countries will have to increase support to their national disaster coordination programs. PAHO's Area on Emergency Preparedness and Disaster Relief will have to strive to remain as small as possible and concentrate even more on specific risk reduction issues not covered by other technical units and institutions, focusing on its coordination mandate.

Progress to date in the Americas has been made possible by a combination of factors, but undoubtedly one key factor is the support of governments, especially United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, who have channeled support, through PAHO. to allow the Region to identify and implement its own solutions. This partnership has now been formalized through an annual meeting which offers the opportunity to review progress and change and target new areas that require further work. At this year's meeting in Belize,

The top-down approach to disaster reduction must be complemented or even supplanted by strong horizontal partnerships.

partners endorsed PAHO's five-year strategic plan to reduce the public health impact of disasters. Their support to the development of national capacities to reduce risk and respond to disasters has been a major step forward in Latin America and the Caribbean in identifying and implementing new and original ways to address present institutional challenges that every country is facing.

Selected Bibliography



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.

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