

DISASTERS



PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION IN THE AMERICAS



Pan American Health Organization
Regional Office of the
World Health Organization

Issue No. 88

News and Information for the International Disaster Community

July 2002

Editorial

Logistical Support Systems: A New Growth Industry

For many years, most humanitarian agencies were unable to monitor and track the flow of commodities arriving in disaster-stricken areas of the world from the time an order was placed or a pledge was made to the actual delivery of the items to the intended recipients. Indeed, few agencies had the resources necessary to develop or adapt an electronic tool to meet their particular needs. In larger institutions, the cost easily amounted to millions of dollars. Commercially available off-the-shelf software packages were more affordable, but often they were unsuited to the administrative environment, needs and culture of NGOs or the U.N.

In 1990, SUMA came onto the scene. Originally designed as a tool to improve coordination and accountability among agencies through logistical information sharing, SUMA progressively incorporated new modules in response to requests from local partners and end-users: the warehouse and "pre-arrival" modules were designed to offer small and mid-size health and non-health humanitarian



Photo: PAHO/WHO, A. Waack

agencies simple but robust tools for basic logistical operations.

During the past decade, the logistical landscape changed dramatically. Large agencies (UN, Red Cross, NGOs) began to develop their own propri-

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The registration deadline for the next LIDERES course is 10 September 2002. The course will be held in Spanish only in Cuernavaca, Mexico from 7-24 October, at the same time and location as the ICRC HELP 2002 course. For more information visit www.disaster.info.desastres.net/LIDERES or write to curso-lideres@paho.org.

Watch for news of the first English-language LEADERS course in the next issue of this newsletter.

News from PAHO/WHO

E-mail Claude de Ville

We regret the error in the last issue of the newsletter concerning Dr. Claude de Ville's forwarding e-mail address. The correct address is: cdevill@attglobal.net (not .com as was printed).

New Web Site on the Floods in Bolivia

On 19 February 2002, during PAHO's meeting of managers from the Organization's South American country offices, La Paz, Bolivia suffered torrential rains accompanied by hail. The storm caused a landslide that swept through the center of the city, causing 80 deaths, 120 injuries, and millions of dollars in economic losses.

Following the floods, the Ministry of Health, the Municipality of La Paz and PAHO conducted a risk assessment study, using geographic information systems to recreate what happened during the floods, identify possible causes and locate other at-risk areas. PAHO's country office in Bolivia has consolidated the results of the study, including graphics and video, into a new web site at www.disaster.info.desastres.net/lapazriada/.



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Second Meeting on Logistical Support Systems

More than sixty logistical experts from UN agencies, humanitarian NGOs and the private sector met for the second time to review progress made on recommendations adopted at the 2001 meeting on logistical support systems. What has happened during the last 12 months that is relevant to the Americas?

Standardizing the classification and coding of relief items was at the forefront. No data exchange is possible without agreement on how to logically organize the wide variety of humanitarian items into a hierarchy of categories and subcategories, assigning each a unique easy-to-use code. Some will remember the endless negotiations between SUMA and DALIS, a long-defunct logistical system, to reach the present classification system, which is useful but arbitrary. Obviously, the time has come to reopen this Pandora's Box and adopt a global rather than a regional system. The recommendations of the working group on classification standards, expected by late September, are a prerequisite for redesigning the new SUMA as the global Logistical Support System!

Coordination among logistics experts also received attention. The role of the logistics officer is a challenging one and is often under-recognized. Communication is essential. OCHA has established an electronic discussion forum and logistics experts are encouraged to apply at <http://webconferences.itu.int:80/~logistics>. Volunteers are sought to promote and moderate bilingual discussions.

The "Global SUMA" project, led by WHO, is based on the model of SUMA in the Americas. WHO, PAHO, WFP and OCHA have proposed a three-year project to redesign the software to serve as a common logistical support system for inter-agency coordination and to develop local capacity in several pilot countries. Scant progress has been made, as no funding has yet been received for global activities. However, the cohesion and solidarity of the four sponsoring agencies in support of this concept and the attitude of other partners and donors was very encouraging. Concrete developments are expected by the end of the year. The Americas will benefit by having world attention focused on the current SUMA software and needed changes. Keeping up with changes in technology and the increased sophistication of users is a challenge that PAHO, a health agency, finds overwhelming, given competing priorities and scarce resources.

Finally, both participants and donors recognized the experience of FUNDESUMA and how this NGO model has complemented the capabilities of larger UN organizations. Through FUNDESUMA, SUMA volunteers in the Americas have demonstrated their leadership. The challenge is now to export this expertise and experience to their cultures and environments, consolidating our regional achievements in transparency and accountability in the management of supplies into a global initiative. For more information write to devillec@paho.org.

Other Organizations

NLM Posts New Web Page on Disasters

The U.S. National Library of Medicine has created a new web site on disasters and emergency medicine. The site contains links to many publications and web sites on specific types of disasters volcanoes, floods and hurricanes, for example and on coping with disasters. This site on disasters is part of the NLM's MEDLINEplus, which also offers pages on infectious diseases in general and other health topics. View this new page at www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus (use the search engine and keyword disaster).

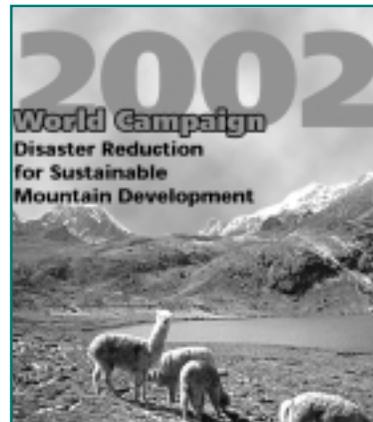
ISDR: Campaign Focuses on Sustainable Mountain Development

October 9, 2002 is International Disaster Reduction Day. This year's campaign, "Disaster Reduction for Sustainable Mountain Development," raises global awareness of successful disaster reduction efforts and experiences in mountainous

areas that can and have helped at-risk populations to reduce their vulnerability.

With an increase in population settlements in these regions comes the increased need to protect those at risk. Mountain disasters such as landslides, rockslides and erosion are unpredictable and therefore pose significant threats that are exacerbated by human development and other factors.

To learn more about this year's campaign visit the ISDR web site www.unisdr.org. Booklets (with facts on mountains and disaster reduction), stickers, children's books on volcanoes and disaster reduction and posters are available.



CRID Holds Course on Disaster Information Management

Experts working in the field of disaster reduction agree that managing disaster information is a key component of their prevention and mitigation activities. Consequently, countries give priority to developing a national capacity in information management in order to have a significant impact on reducing the effects of natural and manmade hazards. With this in mind, the Regional Disaster Information Center (CRID), the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) and PAHO held a training workshop in Bolivia from 20-24 May to improve local capacity in Andean Region countries and provide them with the tools necessary to achieve this. The workshop provided practical tools and helped to foster regional cooperation. The workshop's principal topics were how to create and manage a disaster information center; methodologies to analyze and describe information; databases using MicroIstis software; using disaster thesauruses; and Internet applications in information management. The workshop was held several months after severe flooding struck La Paz, leaving 68 dead and substantial material losses (see page 2). For more information, write to crid@crid.or.cr.

Electronic Resources

Information on hurricanes:

<http://tropical.atmos.colostate.edu/>

Click on 'Forecast' to view projections for the 2002 hurricane season.

www.nhc.noaa.gov/

The Tropical Prediction Center of the U.S. National Weather Service.

<http://hurricanes.noaa.gov/>

News about hurricanes and links to important sites.



Member Countries



Central America Prepares Local Emergency Health Plans

Hurricane Mitch is still a vivid reminder to the health sector in Central America of their vulnerability to disasters. It has served as a catalyst for the development of local emergency health plans in many municipalities and communities. Examples of initiatives in this field include:

- ✦ Nicaragua's Ministry of Health has just published the second edition of a Spanish-language guide that offers a methodology for preparing local level emergency health plans.
- ✦ Health officials from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua participated in a workshop to review the components of a good local level emergency health plan and then visited Nueva Segovia, Nicaragua to learn about their experience in preparing, disseminating and updating their plan.
- ✦ A new publication on Health Disaster Preparedness: A Guide for the Local Level (in Spanish) is going to press. In addition to a discussion of what the health sector can do to reduce the impact of disasters, the guide also addresses issues of community participation and communication. More in the next issue of this newsletter.

CAPRADE Created in the Andean Region

During the last two years, the countries of the Andean Region have been working within and

beyond their borders, identifying both unique and shared characteristics and evaluating social and economic losses that have resulted from past disasters. In this context, the Andean Council of Foreign Ministers has approved the creation of the Andean Committee for Disaster Prevention and Response (CAPRADE).

CAPRADE aims to help to reduce the risk and impact of any potential disaster in the Andean Region by coordinating and promoting policies, strategies, plans and activities related to disaster prevention, mitigation, preparedness and response. It is made up of representatives of the Civil Defense and Ministries of Planning and Foreign Affairs. Other representatives, such as from the Ministries of Health, may be included. For more information see: www.comunidadandina.org/ingles/treaties/dec/D529e.htm.

CLAMED Hosts Disaster Workshop

More than 100 persons participated in a three-day workshop on disaster prevention and mitigation in Central America and the Caribbean, hosted by Cuba's Latin American Center of Disaster Medicine (CLAMED). The workshop, part of a CLAMED-UNICEF project, covered a wide range of topics, from mental health to human resources development and training in disaster medicine to preparing proposals and resource mobilization. CLAMED has posted the objectives, agenda and



The risk of a major chemical accident—whether intentional or not—is a real and growing concern in the Americas. The transport of hazardous chemical products. This has generated a number of

CETESB, the PAHO/WHO Collaborating Center for Technology and Sanitation will host a one-week course on prevention, preparedness and response to disasters caused by hazardous chemical substances. The course will be held in Sao Paulo, Brazil from 24-29 November 2002 (in Spanish only). Registration closes on 8 November. More information is available from Edson Haddad at eeero@cetesb.sp.gov.br or Nilda Fernicola nildaf@cetesb.sp.gov.br or on the web at www.paho.org/spanish/ped/cursointernacional.htm.

APELL is the acronym for A Regional Process for Addressing Local Level, a process community-based approach to respond to technological and natural disasters. It is led by the UN Environmental Programme in cooperation with governments and communities in the Americas to reduce risk, prevent accidents and disasters. More information at: www.unep.org/aPELL. For contact Diego Masera, UNEP Caribbean in Mexico at e-mail masera@unep.org



summary of discussions of this workshop on their web site. Visit www.clamed.sld.cu or write to clamed@infomed.sld.cu.

Around the Caribbean

Antigua: Health sector mass casualty plans were reviewed and carried out during the Tradewinds Exercise in Antigua. Scenarios involved a gas station fire and collapsed buildings following an earthquake.

Bermuda: Many health and disaster response personnel completed training in the mass casualty management system. The Stress Management in Disasters (SMID) Team practiced de-stressing techniques for emergency response personnel. Former students were involved in the field training and final exercises.

Jamaica: Abnormally heavy rainfall in May and June resulted in extensive flooding across Jamaica. Five parishes were declared disaster areas. Flooding and landslides resulted in at least nine deaths and extensive damage in the health, water and sanitation, agriculture, tourism, housing and communications sectors. Critical health problems were encountered with water quality, vector control, sewerage and waste management and damage to health infrastructure. National authorities worked to restore and improve the emergency response capability of the health services, especially for environmental health conditions such as water quality, sanitation and vector control as well for monitoring and response to potential outbreaks of communicable diseases.

St. Vincent & the Grenadines: A Health Disaster Program was established and Dr. Simone Keizer (mosimi@caribsurf.com) has been appointed Health Disaster Coordinator. A national SUMA Team was recently formed and protocols for the Team established. A national Disaster Coordinator, Mr. Howie Prince, has also been appointed.

Turks & Caicos Islands: National authorities conducted a simulation exercise for emergency response to an aircraft incident. Health sector plans and procedures were also exercised and lessons learned are being analyzed. PAHO will be working with health sector authorities to strengthen capabilities for responding to such incidents.

PAHO Caribbean Disaster Response Team Trains

Following the devastation caused by Hurricane David in Dominica in August 1979, PAHO stepped up its program of technical cooperation in disaster management in the Caribbean. One strategy, conceptualized in 1982, was the formation of a "front line" team comprised of staff members from PAHO's Caribbean country offices. PAHO's Disaster Response Team, as it came to be known, addressed the particular needs of small island nations, spread across great geographical distances, in which it was impossible to maintain staff from all required disciplines: epidemiology, food and nutrition; water and sanitation, health services, vector control, communications, etc.

This year, team training and updating was held in Barbados 10-11 June, in preparation for the 2002 hurricane season. Participants also included Caribbean SUMA specialists, stress management in disasters team members, CDERA, the UN, the Red Cross and donors.

al possibility in the Americas, given the growing use, production, storage and initiatives regionwide:

awareness and Preparedness for Emergencies at unities can use to strengthen their capacity to natural disasters. The APPEL process, developed am (UNEP), brings together local industry, gov- a Coordination Group that directs efforts to and help strengthen local responding organiza- www.rolac.unep.mx/industria/esp/apell/apell.htm or Regional Office for Latin America and the masera@rolac.unep.mx.

Brazil's National Health Foundation and the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation organized a workshop to discuss issues of compatibility and standardization of data received from a variety of Brazilian agencies. These issues will be taken into account in a proposal being drawn up to implement a national notification system for major industrial or chemical accidents, similar to the European Union's Major Accident Reporting System (MARS). The National Health Foundation and PAHO will be finalizing a publication of recommendations for implementing a system on disasters caused by hazardous materials. Contact Flavio Nunes at flavio.nunes@funasa.gov.br.



Review of Publications

New Publications from PAHO/WHO

A limited number of print copies of these publications are available. Write to disaster-publications@paho.org

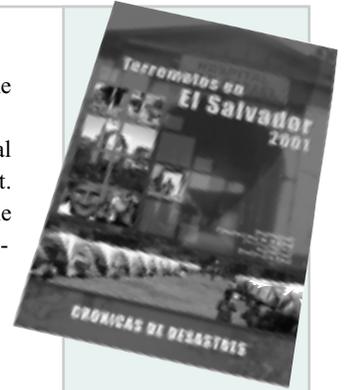
Disaster Chronicles: Earthquakes in El Salvador, 2001 (Spanish only)

This new publication recounts and analyzes, from a health sector perspective, the aftermath of the January and February 2001 earthquakes that caused a major upheaval in El Salvador.

The earthquakes had a disastrous effect on the population and caused serious damage to the physical infrastructure, social services, production sector and, to a large extent, the country's environment. More than 1,150 people lost their lives, 8,000 were injured and 1.5 million affected. ECLAC, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, put a US\$1.255 billion price tag on overall damages and losses.

This book describes the health sector response, and above all, analyzes its impact following the disaster.

Available in full text in Spanish only at www.paho.org/spanish/ped/ELS_2001.htm.



Epidemiological Surveillance in Disaster Situations: Guide for the Local Level (Spanish only)

This guide provides an overview of local-level needs with regard to health information during emergency and disaster situations. It is a practical, simple, flexible tool that is appropriate for use throughout the Americas, if each country's characteristics and special features are taken into account. It has been produced within the framework of a multi-country project in Central America to reduce vulnerability to disasters in areas affected by Hurricane Mitch.

This guide does not attempt to replace or overload existing information systems, nor does it aim to become a parallel system. Its objective is to direct the attention of managers and health authorities to the type of information they need to make strategically sound disaster management decisions.

Many experts throughout the Americas contributed to the publication of this guide, including epidemiologists and surveillance authorities, disaster health officials, municipal political authorities, non-governmental organizations, universities, community leaders and other social actors.

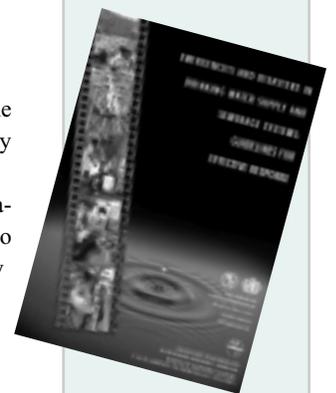
Available in full text in Spanish only at: www.paho.org/spanish/ped/vigep_des.htm.



Natural Disaster Mitigation in Drinking Water and Sewerage Systems: Guidelines for Vulnerability Analysis

The English edition of these guidelines, originally published in 2001 in collaboration with AIDIS, the Inter-American Association of Sanitary and Environmental Engineering, are now available (see the July 2001 issue of the newsletter).

This book offers guidance for preparing emergency and disaster plans for drinking water and sanitation systems. It updates other PAHO documents on this topic and is an important companion text to Natural Disaster Mitigation in Drinking Water and Sewerage Systems: Guidelines for Vulnerability Analysis, published by PAHO in 1998. The book was written for managers, planners and designers as well as operations and maintenance personnel working with water and sanitation systems. Download the full text version at www.paho.org/english/ped/agua.htm.



Coming soon!

Protecting Mental Health in Disaster Situations

This guide will respond to the growing concern of governments, NGOs and the international community about how to better respond to the impact of disasters and emergencies on the mental health of the population. Available in September 2002.

Logistical Support Systems

(from page 1)

etary commodity tracking software and systems (CTS), linked to their financial accounting systems and tailored to meet their reporting needs.

More recently, the topic of humanitarian logistics has caught the attention of the private sector. Large information technology companies have recognized both the scientific challenge and the public relations value of introducing information management principles into the flow of humanitarian supplies. Both IBM and Microsoft are actively dialoguing with humanitarian organizations on the future of Logistical Support Systems (LSS). A new private endowment, the Fritz Institute, is exclusively dedicated to "building capacity of humanitarian actors in logistics," while the Microsoft Foundation supports LSS development in non-governmental organizations.

These developments signal substantial improvements over the isolated efforts of FUNDESUMA, an NGO dedicated to logistics in Latin America and the Caribbean. No doubt these initiatives will offer more choices for individual agencies to manage their own supplies. However, they do not address the need for a consolidated "logistic data warehouse," the coordination and transparency function that is at the heart of SUMA.

Opportunities and challenges

The development of vertical proprietary CTS within large agencies (such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Food Program or the International Federation of Red Cross Societies) offers both an opportunity and a challenge to the SUMA concept of a horizontal depository of information on supplies, regardless of their origin or consignee.

The opportunity lies in the chance to initiate an "electronic dialogue" between the CTS and SUMA, where systems speak to each other via a common language that allows data to be captured and exchanged accurately, thus avoiding time-consuming inspection and inventory of incoming containers by SUMA teams.

The challenge for all parties will be to address standardization requirements in coding and classification of items. For SUMA, this implies a complete overhaul of the existing software. Along the same lines, it would be equally wasteful and counterproductive for other agencies to reinvent the wheel by ignoring SUMA's extraordinary experience.

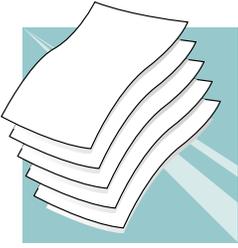
What are the implications of these emerging trends for institutions that currently use SUMA as a management tool? New CTS, whether commercial or not-for-profit, can only benefit the logistics community in Latin America and the Caribbean by offering a greater choice and better products. In humanitarian affairs as in business, competition is fundamentally healthy. In fact, the variety of choices may be so plentiful that end-users may not see why PAHO and SUMA should maintain their own pre-arrival and warehouse modules.

However, it is more likely that SUMA will remain an attractive choice for entry-level inventory and stock control in small and mid-size agencies in Latin America and the Caribbean, thanks to the intimate involvement of its users in its design and the support that is provided to countries at no cost. Sophisticated users or large agencies will probably find that new products come with many more features and functions than SUMA was ever meant to offer.

In any disaster, there is a need for one and only one system to provide all stakeholders (and in fact, everyone is a stakeholder) with comprehensive information on the overall flow of supplies, whether this information is summary or detailed. One single tool for transparency and accountability at the central level is needed. SUMA is well placed to become this global instrument, whether for national disaster coordinators or for the UN Joint Logistics Center. Its success will depend on its capacity to make the transition from simplicity and reliability on a regional scale to a global one. The flexibility, competence and dedication that SUMA volunteers have demonstrated is the best guarantee of a continuing high-level of service to humanitarian institutions both in the Americas and worldwide.



The topic of humanitarian logistics has caught the attention of the private sector. Large information technology companies recognize both the scientific challenge and the public relations value of introducing information management into the flow of humanitarian supplies.



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.7** Weitzenfeld, Henyk. *Contaminación atmosférica y salud en América Latina*, Boletín de la Oficina Sanitaria Panamericana; 112 (2): 97-109, feb., 1992.
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- F.1** Pérez Calderón, Luis Jorge. *Seguridad sísmica en instituciones hospitalarias*. Prevención, P. 18-21. May- August, 1998.
- F.2** Enarson, Elaine and Betty Hearn Morrow. *Why gender? Why women? An introduction to women and disasters*. The gendered terrain of disaster: Through women's eyes. s.1: International Hurricane Center. Laboratory for Social and Behavioral Research, 1998.

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

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July 2002

Disasters: Preparedness and Mitigation in the Americas
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Washington, D. C. 20037-2895
Official Business
Penalty for Private Use \$300

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