

ANNEX II.

SUMA—A HUMANITARIAN SUPPLY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The flood of relief supplies that arrive in the aftermath of a large-scale disaster often pose serious logistic and management problems for national authorities. To address these problems, the Pan American Health Organization, in conjunction with other international agencies and governments, initiated the Supply Management Project, known as SUMA, in 1992.¹ The main objective of this project is to strengthen national capacity to effectively manage humanitarian assistance supplies, from the moment donors commit to sending supplies, to the arrival and distribution of supplies at the site of a disaster. To this end, thousands of officers in more than 30 countries in the Americas and in other regions have received training.

In most countries in the Region of the Americas, SUMA focal points have been designated to coordinate the project. Among the institutions involved in the project are: ministries of health and other health agencies, civil defense or national emergency agencies, ministries of foreign relations, customs departments, Red Cross Societies, fire fighters, and nongovernmental organizations involved in humanitarian assistance.

In the immediate aftermath of large-scale disasters, especially in smaller countries, it may be unrealistic to count on local trained health professionals to sort through incoming medical supplies. PAHO/WHO provides logistical and technical support in mobilizing SUMA teams from nearby countries.

One of the most important features of SUMA is its flexibility. It can be used in many different emergency situations, and for response to natural disasters as well as in complex emergencies. The development and modification of the software has depended on constant feedback from national team members who have used it in a variety of disaster situations and training sessions.

¹The SUMA software is copyrighted by PAHO, but is distributed free of charge in English, Spanish, and French. Copies of SUMA software and manuals are available on request from the Emergency Preparedness Program, PAHO/WHO, 525 23rd St., NW, Washington, DC 20037, USA; Fax (202) 775-4578; e-mail: disaster@paho.org, or from FUNDESUMA, Aptdo. 114, Plaza Mayor 1225, San José, Costa Rica, Fax: (506) 257-2139; e-mail: funsuma@sol.racsa.co.cr. The software and manuals also can be downloaded from the SUMA Web site (<http://www.disaster.info.desastres.net/SUMA/>) where announcements, information on emergencies, and related material can be viewed. Information on SUMA training can be obtained from the above addresses or PAHO/WHO Country Offices in countries of the Region of the Americas.

HOW DOES SUMA WORK?

SUMA team members attend a three-day course, after which they are able to apply SUMA in a disaster situation. The teams sort and label supplies, and employ user-friendly software to create an inventory of supplies and provide reports to disaster managers on the availability and distribution of items.

The system comprises three modules. The Central Level Module is set up at the Emergency Operations Center; the Field Unit Module is the basic data collection unit and operates at the points where supplies arrive during an emergency; and the Warehouse Management Module assists warehouse managers in stock control and distribution to peripheral levels. Another module assists in the management of requests to and offers from donors. Running SUMA software requires an IBM compatible 386 (or faster) computer, with 4 MB of available RAM, and 10 MB of available hard drive.

SORTING AND LABELING SUPPLIES

Information on supplies is collected at different points of entry of the disaster-affected country (e.g., airport, seaport, borders). Items are classified by category, subcategory, and item. Depending on the needs of disaster victims, supplies are sorted into different priority levels and labeled. Adhesive tapes, printed in English, Spanish, and French, are applied to each package received, showing three levels of priority. Urgently needed, or priority 1, items receive red labels, marked "Urgent! Immediate Distribution." Priority 2 supplies, that are useful but not urgently needed, receive blue labels, marked "Non-Urgent Distribution." Priority 3 items, which are of no use or require major time and effort to separate and classify, receive black labels marked "Non-Priority Items." There is space on the labels for writing the contents of the package, its weight, and destination.

After classifying supplies, their technical characteristics, potency, presentation, packaging units, total quantity, etc., are forwarded in electronic format to the central level (the Emergency Operations Center). Standard or customized reports can be easily generated for disaster coordinators, assisting them to monitor pledges from donors and identify gaps or duplications.

DISTRIBUTION AND STORAGE OF SUPPLIES

Once items have been sorted, classified, and inventoried, they are delivered to the consignees, or they are sent to an existing or temporary storage facility. SUMA teams work at warehouses and distribution hubs, managing information on the distribution of items from central to peripheral sites. All information regarding the distribution is transferred to the Emergency Operations Center.

ANNEX FIGURE II.1. Graphic overview of SUMA.

