

Health Situation Report

4 November 2002

PAHO/WHO

1. Introduction

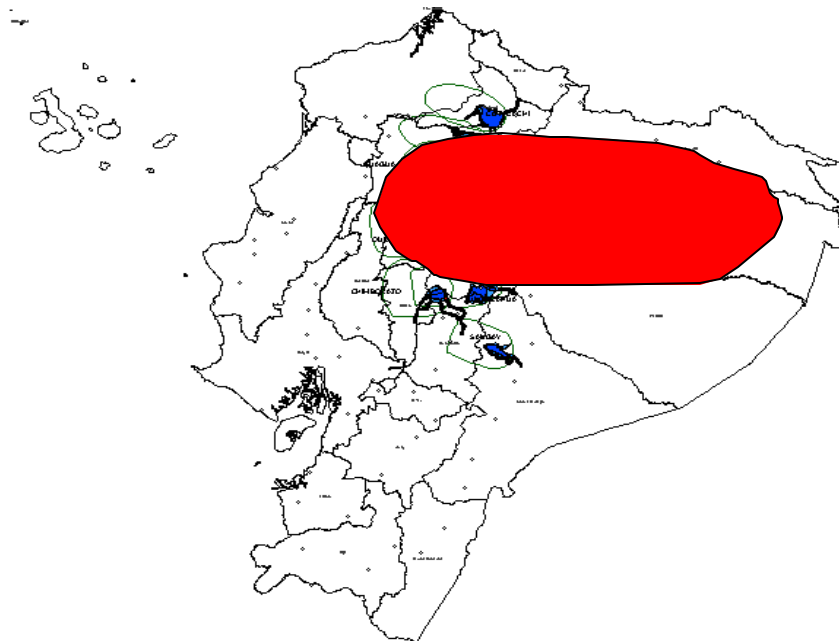
The Reventador volcano, located 90 km. NE of Quito in the province of Sucumbíos, erupted on Sunday. After the first great explosion (with a cloud of ashes that reached 15 km. in height) volcano activity continued to be intense.

According to the Ecuadorian Red Cross, there have been no casualties reported. Seventy families have been evacuated, and according to data from Civil Defense there are already 800 people in shelters. Fortunately, the area around the volcano is not highly populated.

As a consequence of the explosions, the city of Quito and the central provinces (in addition to Pichincha, it is also affecting Imbabura, Cotopaxi, Orellana and Sucumbíos) are covered by an ash cloud. The indirect effects of the volcanic ash rain are affecting more than two million people, who are at risk from the air pollution and possible contamination of water deposits.

The government has declared a state of emergency in the affected areas. The airport in Quito remains closed, schools are not functioning, and administrative leave was granted in order to avoid exposure to the ashes. Quito's City Hall reported that, to date, the water is safe and that deposits have not been contaminated.

The Geophysical Institute of the National Polytechnic School reported that volcanic activity could continue in the coming days. The map below indicates the main affected areas:



2. Actions of the Ministry of Health

The Ministry of Health will address efforts in the following areas:

1. Health care to the affected population.
2. Provision of safe water for human consumption.
3. Provision of basic drugs.
4. Guarantee hospital emergency services.
5. Community awareness and information activities through the media.

Activities:

- Five mobile medical care units of the Ministry of Health and 16 of the Prefecture of Pichincha were mobilized to the affected area.
- Two water tank vehicles for collection and maintenance of safe water were shipped.
- A sufficient stock of drugs and masks for this phase of the emergency was delivered to the affected areas.
- Air and water quality are being monitored, especially in the vicinity of the volcano and in the principal urban areas (including Quito).
- At local level the Provincial Health Offices have activated rapid response and damage assessment teams and have also established a situation room for information management.
- The Ministry of Health has requested that the National Government declares a state of sanitary emergency in the three most affected provinces (Pichincha, Sucumbíos and Napo).

3. Actions of PAHO/WHO

Since the first hours of the emergency PAHO/WHO has been coordinating response activities with the Ministry of Health and with other United Nations agencies. Two PAHO staff members, together with authorities of the Ministry of Health, traveled to Baeza.

PAHO has established a situation room to follow up on the emergency and has set up a crisis team.

At a meeting of the Coordinating Committee of the United Nations System it was decided to declare Phase I of the Security Plan for the provinces of Pichincha, Napo, and Sucumbíos. It was also decided to recommend the suspension of international missions to Ecuador until further notice.

4. Situation in SUCUMBIOS

The disaster coordinator of the Sucumbios Provincial Health Office reported that the rapid response team was mobilized yesterday to the affected area. No casualties have been reported, and access to health units is normal. The population near the volcano has been displaced to the parishes of El Reventador and Lumbaqui. Approximately 30 families have been evacuated. There are no health related problems in this area; however, the Provincial Health Director has ordered the reinforcement of the health units with medicines and human resources (2 physicians, 1 nurse and 1 nursing auxiliary) and has a mobile unit with medicines and professionals, including a psychologist for mental health care.

Twelve water systems were affected by the ash; this represents 30% of the total rural systems in the entire province. The urban systems have not been evaluated, but since the wells tend to be deeper the possibility of contamination diminishes.

A team of the Provincial Health Bureau is being mobilized to the parish of El Reventador.

5. Situation in NAPO

The Napo Provincial Health Office reported that the health units of Bombón and Las Palmas were the most affected. Health care was interrupted and the population was evacuated to Chaco and Lumbaqui. The Napo Provincial Health Director, together with an epidemiologist, traveled to the affected area. There is still not exact data of the health situation in this area because of communication difficulties.

6. Situation in QUITO

The ash rain continues to be intense, hindering the visibility and creating serious problems to the local traffic. The authorities have banned vehicular circulation, except for emergencies. The quantity of ash particles in the air yesterday was of 1,000 mcg., and it is estimated that today is higher than 2,000 mcg. Hospital emergency services are operating normally.

7. Situation in ORELLANA

Eight water systems were reported affected, representing 50% of the entire rural system of this province.

Difficulties have also been reported with vehicle circulation and the ash cloud.