

# DISASTERS

## PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION IN THE AMERICAS



Issue No. 78

News and Information for the International Disaster Community

October 1999

### Who will take responsibility for disaster reduction?

*In the April issue of Disasters, we discussed the role of different agencies in responding to and mitigating the impacts of natural disasters ("Emergency Response and Disaster Reduction: Can One Single Agency Handle Both?"). That article stated that it was unreasonable to expect any single institution to master all of the skills and influence required to both react operationally in a crisis and effect long-term socioeconomic priorities in favor of "risk-friendly development". That critique prompted some debate and so, this editorial expands the discussion. (Did you miss the April '99 issue? If so, it can be found online at: [www.paho.org/english/ped/ped499e.pdf](http://www.paho.org/english/ped/ped499e.pdf).)*

Reducing vulnerability to natural disasters, or disaster reduction, is a complex process requiring a commitment from society as a whole, and too broad and serious a matter to be left to the efforts of the "disaster experts" alone. Involving civil society and communities is critical to reducing the impacts of disasters on social and economic development.

Disaster reduction is a complex process, including functions as distinct as preventing possible risks and mobilizing the emergency response in the immediate aftermath



*Involving civil society and communities is critical to reducing the impacts of disasters on social and economic development.*

of a disaster. The national bodies within a country charged with legislating issues related to disasters need to assign roles for each of these functions (response vs. prevention), depending on the strengths and capabilities of the different institutions involved:

*Disaster response* requires operational skills, access to logistical resources and a disciplined field structure. Traditionally, the armed forces have provided these skills, an asset making the defense establishment the most effective player in a time of severe crisis.

*(cont. on page 7)*

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# News from PAHO/WHO

## PAHO Directing Council Passes Disaster Resolution

Inter-American Development Bank, David Mangrison



*Even after one year, the effects of Hurricane Mitch are still felt throughout many parts of Central America. Yet, often our memory cannot recall the management lessons learned from these disasters as quickly as we recall the physical damages. PAHO's new Disaster Chronicle on Hurricanes Georges and Mitch will help to preserve these institutional lessons (see page 6).*

PAHO's 35 Member Governments in Latin America and the Caribbean met in September at the annual Directing Council Meeting. Among the many public health issues they considered was a report on the health impact and response

to Hurricanes Georges and Mitch. One year later, the magnitude of these devastating disasters is even clearer. Despite the rapid response from the health sector, certain areas require continued strengthening, especially the collection and analysis of epidemiological information, emergency supply management, institutional organization, electronic information management and coordination with other sectors. The Directing Council approved a Resolution calling on PAHO's Member Countries to endorse the recommendations from the February 1999 Evaluation Meeting on the Preparedness and Response to Hurricanes Georges and Mitch, and asked Member States to include disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness issues in their policies on social development and health sector reform. The resolution also mandated that the SUMA system (supply management) be recognized as the regional standard in emergencies. The complete text of the report and Resolution are on the Web at: [www.paho.org/english/ags/cd41index.htm](http://www.paho.org/english/ags/cd41index.htm) (click on CD41/8). □

## WHO Handbook on Emergency Situations

WHO's Department of Emergency and Humanitarian Action has circulated the first test edition of a Handbook for Emergency Field Operations to all WHO regional offices. The Handbook is designed for WHO staff working in complex emergencies or other scenarios where a

WHO presence must be established from scratch. The Handbook is not an encyclopedia of emergency management, nor is it intended to replace the WHO Manual. Its six chapters deal with Readiness; Getting to the Field; Preparing for Operations (rapid assessment, establishing an office, recruitment, procurement, finance and customs); Starting the Operations (strategic coordination, planning and resources mobilization); Running the Operations (information management, field supervision, reporting and operational coordination); and Completing the Assignment. Annexes contain guidelines, references, templates and checklists, some of which are on diskettes, including the SUMA Program. Available on the Web at: [www.who.int/eha/resource/manuals/index.htm](http://www.who.int/eha/resource/manuals/index.htm) (click on Handbook for Emergency Field Operations). For further details, contact [shaha@who.int](mailto:shaha@who.int). □

## PAHO and WHO Collaborate on Training in Nepal

PAHO and WHO collaborated with the U.S. Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance to organize two training courses in Nepal—Mass Casualty Management Training Course and the Health Sector Contingency Planning Workshop—both of which have been well received in the Caribbean. Trainers from the Caribbean helped to provide expertise and the courses targeted personnel from the Ministry of Health, hospitals, ambulance services and other first response agencies. Future activities are planned with the Nepalese Ministry of Health to update the hospital and health sector national disaster plans permanently. It is hoped that these projects will be duplicated in Indonesia and India. Nepal also plans to conduct a structural assessment in selected hospitals in Kathmandu as a follow-up to a 1998 Hospital Mitigation Workshop. These activities have opened the door for collaboration between PAHO (WHO's American Regional Office) and WHO's Southeast Asia Regional Office, and particularly between the Caribbean and countries in Asia. For more information contact PAHO's Disaster Office in Barbados, fax (246) 436-6447 or email: [vanalphd@cpc.paho.org](mailto:vanalphd@cpc.paho.org). □

# Other Organizations

## Global Links: Recycling Puts Castaways to Good Use

Emergency preparedness programs and networks stand ready to swing into action in the wake of natural disasters, meeting the acute, immediate needs of the population. But frequently countries have “chronic” needs that may best be met through on-going, non-emergency aid programs. Global Links, an international U.S.-based NGO, runs one such program. Global Links specializes in collecting batch and single item medical materials, and distributing them to health care facilities in developing countries. Recycled materials include biomedical equipment, hospital furnishings, pharmaceuticals and medical supplies. Sending “anything” to people in need is not necessarily better than sending nothing. Global Links has seen first hand the difficulties caused when well-meaning organizations or individuals send random items in variable conditions to overseas facilities that are not prepared to use them, and so checks all equipment for functionality and completeness prior to shipping, and always includes service and operating manuals. Nothing is sent to a facility until the level of medical and technical sophistication at the institution is known, and that the materials are wanted and will be appropriately used. Learn more about Global Links at [www.globallinks.org](http://www.globallinks.org) or contact them by e-mail [global@telerama.lm.com](mailto:global@telerama.lm.com) or fax (412) 361-4950. □

## Médecins sans Frontières wins Nobel Peace Prize

Congratulations to Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières), the recipient of the 1999 Nobel Peace Prize. MSF adheres to the fundamental principle that all disaster victims, whether the disaster is natural or human in origin, have a right to professional assistance, given as quickly and efficiently as possible. PAHO has been privileged to work with MSF in the Americas as partners in the Regional Disaster Information Center (CRID) in Costa Rica, and on projects dealing with the displaced population in Colombia. □



## OAS Creates Disaster Reduction Committee

The OAS General Assembly has created an Inter-American Committee for Natural Disaster Reduction as a political forum for the Americas to address the topic in the context of development. In this regard, the Committee will enable a dialogue and propose policies and strategies to inform and direct the decisions of the Member States. The OAS will form a working group to establish a framework for the coordination of emergency assistance following disasters in the Region. The OAS has asked PAHO to chair this group which will also include representatives from multilateral agencies, regional and international organizations, and NGOs. □

[www.drugdonations.org](http://www.drugdonations.org) provides information about issues relating to the quality of drug donations in an effort to implement inter-agency guidelines on this topic. The site was developed by a consortium of NGOs to promote good donations practices. Many NGOs and UN agencies, including WHO, sponsor these guidelines. The site is available in seven languages.

[www.disasterrelief.org](http://www.disasterrelief.org) is a joint effort of IBM, the American Red Cross and CNN. The site provides up-to-the minute news on disasters worldwide and tracks continuing news stories on major disasters. The site also contains archives of disaster stories from the past 30 days, or you can search through all stories written since November 1996.

[www.mvorat.com](http://www.mvorat.com) is operated by the Montserrat Volcano Observatory. It was established soon after the first eruption of the Soufriere Hills volcano on 18 July 1995, and posts weekly reports and photographs of the volcano.

[www.ccep.ca](http://www.ccep.ca) offers online registration for the electronic news magazine of the Canadian Centre for Emergency Preparedness. Use the web site to subscribe and receive one article per week via e-mail on issues related to emergency management. Subscribers can also submit articles for distribution to [mbittle@new-focus.org](mailto:mbittle@new-focus.org).

On  
the  
Web



# Member Countries

## Mexico: Meeting on Monitoring of the FuegoVolcano

The Fuego Volcano in Colima, Mexico is one of the IDNDR's 16 Volcanos of the Decade, and its most recent 1998-99 eruption yielded much new and interesting data. The University of Colima



Mauricio Bretón

will host an international meeting 6-10 March 2000 to discuss initial results of the study and the methods of monitoring the Fuego volcano. The meeting includes poster sessions and a field trip to the volcano. Information on their web site [www.ucol.mx/volcan](http://www.ucol.mx/volcan), by e-mail [colima00@cgc.ucol.mx](mailto:colima00@cgc.ucol.mx) or fax (52-331) 27-581. □

## Disaster Managers Study Threat of Chemical Accidents

Representatives from 18 Latin American countries attended a comprehensive one week course organized by PAHO and CETESB, Sao Paulo, Brazil's Environmental Sanitation Agency which is also a World Health Organization Collaborating Center in Disasters. The course helped to review the concepts of prevention and planning for chemical emergency situations and the principal techniques for evaluating risks associated with hazardous substances. All technical and training material was distributed to the participants in print form and on CD-ROM. CETESB will repeat this training activity in October 2000. For more information on this course contact [ricardos@cetesb.br](mailto:ricardos@cetesb.br) or [nildaf@cetesb.br](mailto:nildaf@cetesb.br) or visit their web site at [www.cetesb.br/ingles/ingles.htm](http://www.cetesb.br/ingles/ingles.htm). □

## Paraguay: National Emergency Committee Holds Workshops

PAHO's environmental health specialists in Paraguay helped to support four national workshops on Risk Management and Organization of Emergency Committees in four departments in this country. Thanks to a demonstration of interest on the part of local authorities and community representatives, more than 120 persons attended these workshops and received training in disaster preparedness, management, mitigation and response. The workshops primarily targeted floods, drought and high winds, the principal threats to Paraguay in terms of natural disasters. For more information contact Paulo Teixeira, PAHO/WHO Office in Paraguay, fax: (595-21) 214-139 or e-mail: [teixeira@par.ops-oms.org](mailto:teixeira@par.ops-oms.org). □

## BVI: A Boost for Preparedness and Contingency Planning

The Office for Disaster Preparedness of the British Virgin Islands has recognized the need to develop a comprehensive disaster management program that focuses on all hazards and all aspects of planning. They recently completed a National Health Sector Emergency Management Plan and finalized the National Welfare and Relief Distribution Plan. In addition to relief supply distribution systems, the latter plan addresses certain areas that are not commonly part of mainstream emergency plans: in addition to shelter and welfare, it also looks at price freezing and the need for curfews in the aftermath of disasters. Usually when relief goods arrive in a country following a disaster, they are inventoried and stored, but no provision is made as to how they will actually be distributed. BVI is currently using SUMA and SUMA warehousing module to catalog the National Relief Supplies Stockpile. BVI has a trained national SUMA team and one of their goals for the year 2000 is to establish a full-time Health Disaster Coordinator within the Ministry of Health to ensure that the health program is fully implemented. Contact: Sharleen Da Breo, National Disaster Coordinator, British Virgin Islands, Fax: (284) 494-2024; e-mail: [bviudp@caribsurf.com](mailto:bviudp@caribsurf.com). □



[www.disasterinfo.desastres.net/SUMA/](http://www.disasterinfo.desastres.net/SUMA/)

Following is a sample of SUMA activities around the world. The next newsletter will have excerpts from FUNDESUMA's annual report, currently in development, which contains comprehensive coverage of the project's activities, achievements and future plans.

### In the Americas

SUMA teams were busy providing support to countries that had experienced torrential rains, floods and mudslides brought on by 1999's tropical storms and hurricanes—Bret, Dennis, Floyd, Irene, Jose.

In **Honduras**, COPECO, the national emergency management agency, recently created the Bureau for SUPply MAnagement (SUMA), a new branch of COPECO, to deal with supply management issues. During this year's emergency, this division oversaw the management of supplies and donations, keeping authorities informed of the general movement of supplies, and facilitating coordination between institutions.

In **El Salvador**, the National Emergency Committee (COEN) took action to distribute existing supplies. Previous training and the experience gained from Hurricane Mitch was evident in the effectiveness of the operation. COEN plans to incorporate SUMA methodologies into its general operating procedures.

In **Costa Rica**, the Red Cross used SUMA to receive and distribute supplies in affected areas, with support from PAHO/WHO and FUNDESUMA.

In **Mexico**, the Red Cross used SUMA in its relief operations to channel assistance arriving from abroad, designating regional collection cen-

ters in non-affected areas and coordinating interstate support.

Volcanic activity in the region also kept SUMA teams active...

In **Ecuador**, the emergency situation caused by the Tungurahua volcano prompted the quick organization of a training program in the three provinces affected by the volcano. Many critical disaster agencies, including Civil Defense, NGOs, the Red Cross and the Ministry of Health were trained.

### Around the World

*In the past few years, increasing international recognition has landed SUMA teams in Rwanda, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and other countries. This year's notable mission outside of the Americas was in East Timor.*

In response to the crisis in East Timor, OCHA requested a SUMA team to assist in the management, classification and distribution of medical supplies. The one-month mission began in Darwin, Australia and continued in Dili, East Timor, where SUMA experts provided training and developed a customized program to manage requests and pledges for assistance. This module will soon be made available to embassies and other interested agencies.

For more information, [contact funsuma@sol.racsaco.cr](mailto:contact_funsuma@sol.racsaco.cr). □

### New for SUMA Instructors

Consult the SUMA website for information on the following new products:

- **Instructor's Manual for SUMA Version 5.1 in DOS**; includes lesson plans and audiovisual materials.
- **Field Operations Manual**; information on organizing the SUMA team, needs assessment, logistics and troubleshooting; conversion tables, electricity, airlines, and airport operations.

### Did you know?

The Windows version of SUMA is now being used in emergencies and in training sessions.

Updated lists of SUMA trained volunteers and instructors are available on the SUMA website.

A new "SUMA" email list was created to keep interested individuals up to date on SUMA training, software and mission activities. Subscribe to the list from the SUMA homepage.

### Training Curriculum Expanded



When training for SUMA began in 1992, it consisted of learning how to use the software program. A few years later it was apparent that volunteers needed more comprehensive training in supply management to fully implement the SUMA system and to establish it as a regional standard.

The Integrated Management of Emergency Supplies (MISE) course was designed to address this need. MISE is a two-day course taught in combination with the Supply Management

Software (SMS) course, or separately, and includes logistics, warehouse management, transportation and distribution. To date, MISE courses have been given in the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico, El Salvador, Colombia, Peru, Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia. □



# PAHO Review of Publications

PAHO recently published three important technical documents. These publications (with the exception of the *Mental Health Manuals*) can be viewed and downloaded from [www.paho.org/english/ped/pedsren.htm](http://www.paho.org/english/ped/pedsren.htm). A limited number is available and can be requested by e-mail: [disaster-publications@paho.org](mailto:disaster-publications@paho.org) or fax: (202) 775-4578.

## Humanitarian Assistance in Disaster Situations: A Guide for Effective Aid

Whether post-disaster aid is a benefit or a burden has been the topic of debate for decades. PAHO's Directing Council passed a resolution in 1986 that addresses this very issue. Now almost 15 years after pledging to adhere to a regional policy designed to help make humanitarian assistance more effective, we have witnessed many success stories in Latin America and the Caribbean. Unfortunately, much



remains to be accomplished, particularly at the global level, as witnessed by the outpouring of aid in Kosovo, Turkey, Taiwan and East Timor.

This new publication combines and updates several older publications on the topic, and donors, NGOs, embassies, and others may find it useful. Not a policy document, it is meant for the well meaning donor community and should be broadly distributed. □

## Disaster Chronicle on Hurricanes Georges and Mitch

One will not soon forget the hurricanes of 1998—particularly Georges and Mitch. They left such a devastating impact on the Caribbean and Central America that in some countries, it may take 20 years to recover to pre-hurricane levels. Yet even living through as difficult a lesson as these two hurricanes provided, institutional memory tends to be fragile. Frequent turnovers among health personnel, national authorities and legislators are common and make it even more essen-



tial to recover and preserve the health management lessons learned so that future generations of disaster managers do not commit the same mistakes. The publication contains eight country reports that together present the experiences of the English-speaking Caribbean, Haiti and the Dominican Republic following Hurricane Georges, and Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador and Belize in the wake of Mitch. This Disaster Chronicle is only available in Spanish. □

## Mental Health in Disasters

When it comes to disasters, mental health often appears low on the checklist of public health concerns. During the response to Hurricanes Georges and Mitch, it was again apparent that very few plans exist to manage the psychosocial aspects of disasters.

In an attempt to fill in the gaps, PAHO has published two companion manuals entitled "Salud mental para víctimas de desastres: Guía para instructores" (Instructor's Guide) and "Manual para Trabajadores" (Field Worker's Manual). Both publications are available in Spanish only. Dr. Raquel Cohen, a leading expert



in the field of mental health in disasters, prepared these manuals, which can be used just as easily by health workers who find themselves dealing with the psychosocial aspects of emergency situations as by instructors to train communities. Both books are flexible and can be adapted to local needs.

By publishing and distributing this book in the Americas, PAHO hopes to contribute to ongoing mental health training efforts in communities vulnerable to disasters and to reduce the serious mental health consequences of disasters on the affected population. □

## . . . who will take responsibility?

(from page 1)

*Preventing and mitigating* the impact of disasters on socioeconomic infrastructure requires the skills of planners, economists, and other experts in rural or urban development. Access to the mind and hearts of decision-makers in industry, private or public sectors leads to the commitment of countries.

We are currently living in a global village, and with globalization comes the threat of unregulated, short-term profit-making, that does not take into account medium and long-term development. This is why reducing a country's vulnerability to disasters can only be achieved in conjunction with the participation of civil society.

Perhaps the lack of substantive progress in disaster prevention can be traced to the political misconception that everything "disaster-related" is best handled by the same group that provides emergency assistance. In fact, disaster prevention and disaster response are dealt with by different interlocutors, a fact that reflects the distinct skills and positioning required for each task.

In between operational response and the inclusion of mitigation in development, lies preparedness. On the one hand, preparedness is a typical development activity in terms of strengthening institutions and developing human resources. On

the other hand, the essence of preparedness is to prepare for response. The two responsibilities (preparedness and response) cannot be easily disassociated, and the most effective response requires an established network and system, one

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### *With globalization comes the threat of unregulated, short-term profit-making.*

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that is developed through preparedness contacts, from being leaders in the preparedness phase and applying lessons learned from experience. The two are, by default, linked.

Emergency committees and other response coordination mechanisms or agencies have the skills and experience that make them effective in response and preparedness activities. Distinct mechanisms are now required to introduce all aspects of disaster reduction into the main stream of socioeconomic development with equal effect. □

## New e-mail address for CRID

CRID, the Regional Disaster Information Center has changed its domain name.

Please note the following addresses:

- General information: [crid@crid.or.cr](mailto:crid@crid.or.cr).
- Ask a librarian: [ileana.sanchez@crid.or.cr](mailto:ileana.sanchez@crid.or.cr).

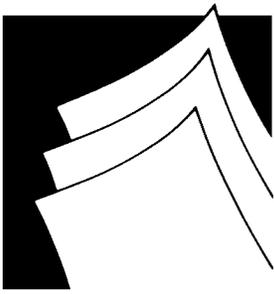
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## Additions to PAHO/WHO Technical Guidelines on Disasters

PAHO has updated the section of its Web site devoted to technical guidelines on a wide variety of public health issues related to disasters. Due to ongoing volcanic activity in Ecuador, Mexico and Montserrat, and the potential health risks involved, guidelines on the health effects of volcanic eruptions have recently been added. PAHO acknowledges Dr. Peter Baxter of



the Department of Community Medicine, University of Cambridge, for his collaboration in the preparation of these guidelines, which together with other material is available at [www.paho.org/english/ped/pedhome.htm](http://www.paho.org/english/ped/pedhome.htm). (click on Technical Guidelines under What's New). Let us know what other public health issues interest you. □



# 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.

**Z.2-E** The Sphere Project, "Minimum standards in water supply and sanitation," *Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response*. [www.sphereproject.org](http://www.sphereproject.org).

**Z.3** Tassara, Carlo and Luigi Grando, "Análisis y prioridades operativas para enfrentar los efectos del huracán Mitch en materia de vivienda e infraestructuras," *NGO Voice*, 1999.

**Z.4** Roberts, Adam, "The role of humanitarian issues in international politics in the 1990s," *International Review of the Red Cross: Humanitarian Debate: Law, Policy, Action*, Vol. 81, No. 833, pp. 19-43, March 1999.

**Z.5** Hernandez, Gabriela, "El huracán de los pobres . . . y de las oportunidades," *Masica*, Special edition, pp. 6-14, February 1999.

**Z.6** Buckle, Phillip, "Re-defining community and vulnerability in the context of emergency management," *The Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, Vol. 13, No. 4, pp. 21-26, 1999.

**Z.7** Gaborit, Mauricio, "Rehabilitación psicosocial después de un desastre natural: El Mitch y El Salvador."

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