

# DISASTERS



## PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION IN THE AMERICAS



Issue No. 69

News and Information for the International Disaster Community

April 1997

### Editorial Three, two, one... Gone?

**W**e have only three years left to achieve the goals of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction and to comply with the commitments formally made at the World Conference in Yokohama, Japan in 1994.

In a nutshell, what did we commit to at this World Conference? Simply stated, we pledged to reduce the vulnerability of all the countries to natural hazards—earthquakes, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions and others—whether through improved building techniques, public awareness campaigns or early warning systems.

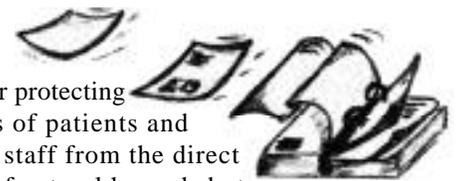
In the health sector, our collective commitment made in Yokohama goes far beyond traditional preparedness of the health sector. It not only

called for protecting the lives of patients and hospital staff from the direct impact of natural hazards but also for maintaining critical services such as medical care, water, and sanitation, regardless of the cost.

As a case in point, the International Conference on Disaster Mitigation in Health Facilities, held in Mexico City in February 1996, singled out the vulnerability of hospitals as an immediate target for action. Clear steps and a plan of action were adopted and publicized.

Where are the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean today, seven years into the Decade, three years after Yokohama, and one year after

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### Internet and Disaster and Epidemic Management: All Passengers Aboard!



Using the Internet for crisis management requires more than technology—it depends just as much on changing attitudes about how we gather and exchange information.

Photo: PAHO/WHO

**M**anaging any type of an emergency—from early warning of tropical storms, to prevention of hazardous materials incidents to detection of severe outbreaks of disease—means managing information. And today, emergency managers have more places than ever to look for the information they need. What was once limited to telephone reports relaying data on an epidemic, or simple printed copies of after-action disaster reports, is now available by satellite linkup, video conferencing, and more commonly, over the Internet.

This fascination, across sectors, with all things “cyber”, has led to a glut of conferences, meetings, and workshops on the seemingly limitless uses of the Internet. But a glance around the room at any of these gatherings reveals that

*(cont. on pg. 7)*

# News from PAHO/WHO



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## PAHO/IDNDR Disaster Documentation Center Expanding

Almost all readers are familiar in one way or another with PAHO's Regional Disaster Documentation Center in San Jose, Costa Rica. However, plans are underway to expand the Center into a multi-agency project. An international meeting, held in February, had important results for the future of regional cooperation in the fields of information and documentation on disasters. At Costa Rica's National Emergency Commission, headquarters of the Center, and under the coordination of the DHA/IDNDR regional office, donor agencies and international organizations from the Americas agreed to:

- form a group of partners to transform the current Center (PAHO/IDNDR) into a new multi-agency and multi-disciplinary Regional Disaster Information Center, to be called CRID. Already forming part of this group are: the Pan American Health Organization, the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs/International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Doctors without Borders, the Center for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America (CEPRENAC), and the National Emergency Commission of Costa Rica.
- create a Regional Disaster Information System (CRID would serve as the Coordinating Center), joining all centers and organizations that

can supply, collect, process and disseminate information in Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition to the organizations mentioned, La Red, the network of Disaster Prevention Social Studies, is a member together with its associated centers.

The conclusions of this meeting are available from the Regional Disaster Documentation Center or from the Editor of this Newsletter. □

## Managing Disasters in the Americas: Who's Who on the Net

Take a look at the redesigned Web site on Natural Disasters in Nicaragua (<http://www.ops.org.ni/desas-ni>). This PAHO country office has served as the administrator for [desastres-ca@ops.org.ni](mailto:desastres-ca@ops.org.ni), a predominantly Spanish-language discussion group on general topics of interest to the disaster community. A new search engine lets you seek out names, organizations and e-mail addresses of the entire group, by country, or on particular individual. This web site also offers other information on natural disasters in Nicaragua and may serve as a model for countries interested in developing similar sites. Contact the webmaster Denis Rodriguez to exchange ideas or to subscribe to this list: [desastre@ops.org.ni](mailto:desastre@ops.org.ni). □

## WHO/EHA Offers Health Emergency Preparedness Course

WHO's Division of Emergency and Humanitarian Action (EHA) has organized a four-week diploma course in health emergency preparedness and crisis management this June in Sweden. Designed for health professionals with relevant experience in emergency management, the curriculum includes epidemiology and disasters, emergency planning, search and rescue, logistics and public health aspects of emergencies. Course fees total approximately US\$3000; WHO awards fellowships through member governments, and Ministries of Health should be able to provide information on this. For applications contact WHO/EHA, 20 Avenue Appia, CH-1211, Geneva 27, Switzerland; fax (4122) 791-4844; e-mail [koobp@who.ch](mailto:koobp@who.ch). □

## Attention! Disaster Community in South America

One of the most efficient ways to maintain contact with professional colleagues on topics of mutual interest is to use electronic discussion groups (listservs) on the Internet, as mentioned in the note on Who's Who (see above).

PAHO is establishing a similar disaster discussion group for South America. If you are interested in becoming a member of this predominantly Spanish-speaking group (participation not limited to countries in South America), please send an e-mail message to [pedecu@ecnet.ec](mailto:pedecu@ecnet.ec). Give us your name, organization, mailing address and a brief description of your disaster-related responsibilities. You will receive e-mail communications from the group with instructions on how to circulate messages and participate in discussions. Watch for announcements on upcoming hospital preparedness and mitigation discussion groups. We are looking forward to hearing from you. □

# Other Organizations

## Success of IDNDR Virtual Conference

About 82,000 hits were registered at the web site of the IDNDR's virtual conference on "Solutions for Cities at Risk" <<http://www.quipu.net/risk/>> during September and October of 1996. This was in addition to the 460 participants who registered for the conference by e-mail and could actively read and comment on the discussions day-by-day. At the recent meeting of the IDNDR Scientific and Technical Committee in Paris, the 1996 Internet Conference was referred to frequently, and members expressed interest in continuing such electronic applications for vulnerability reduction. (The STC is a group of 25 experts appointed by the UN Secretary General to provide advice to IDNDR partners.) Because of the relatively low financial cost of this type of activity, the IDNDR is seeking funding to prepare the Internet Conference proceedings, and to set up electronic (and other) activities for the 1997 disaster reduction day campaign. The Conference documents will be posted on the web site until mid-1997. For more information contact the IDNDR Secretariat in Geneva: <natalie.domeisen@dha.unicc.org> or the regional office for the Americas <hmolin@undpcos.nu.or.cr> □

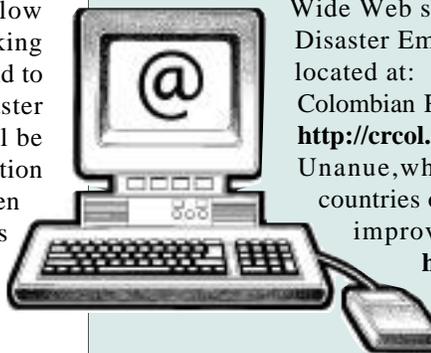
## InterAction Pilot Course in Complex Disasters

A multi-agency task force, under the umbrella of InterAction, a consortium of NGOs, has designed a course on Health in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies. The two-week course is designed to improve the response capability of private voluntary

organizations through operational training, and will be held 24 May-7 June in Emmitsburg, Maryland. It will cover culture and crisis, epidemiology, nutrition, environmental health communicable diseases and other health aspects of these situations. For application information contact Jane Swan, InterAction, 1717 Massachusetts Ave., Suite 801, Washington, D.C. 20036; fax (202) 667-8236; [jswan@interaction.org](mailto:jswan@interaction.org) □

## New Web Sites

Several organizations have notified us of their new World Wide Web sites. CDERA, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency is located at: <http://www.cderra.org>. The Colombian Red Cross Society is located at: <http://crol.org.co>. The Convenio Hipolito Unanue, which promotes the efforts of countries of Andean Region countries to improve health can be found at:



<http://www3.rcp.net.pe/hipolito/index.htm>.

Costa Rica's National Emergency Commission is at: <http://www.cne.go.cr> PAHO has links to many electronic disaster sites worldwide on its Web page. Visit us at [www.paho.org/english/disaster.htm](http://www.paho.org/english/disaster.htm) or request a copy of the list by email: [disaster@paho.org](mailto:disaster@paho.org).

# Upcoming Meetings

## June

2-6 The I World Meeting on Integral City Protection Against Fire and Other Hazards will be held in Toledo, Spain. For a program agenda contact the Organizing Secretariat at fax: (34-1) 541-9405.

22-25 The World Bank and the government of Canada, in partnership with three dozen public and private sponsoring organizations, will co-host a major international conference on the impact of the information revolution on economic and social development. The conference, *Global Knowledge '97*, will take place in Toronto, June 22-25 1997. *Global Knowledge '97* will bring 1,200 leaders from national government, industry, science, academia, multilateral,

nongovernmental, and philanthropic organizations from more than 100 countries. Participants will explore how knowledge and information can be harnessed and new partnerships forged to advance economic growth and social cohesion in the next century. Visit the Conference web site at <http://www.globalknowledge.org>

26-1 July The III International Conference on Local Authorities Confronting Disasters and Emergencies will be held in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Four tracks will focus on planning, response, recovery, and mitigation. More information can be found on their Web page at: <http://www.freenet.edmonton.ab.ca/disaster/> or send a message to Herb Presley at [preslh@censsw.gov.ab.ca](mailto:preslh@censsw.gov.ab.ca) □

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# Member Countries

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## West Indies: University Hosts Disaster Course

The Department of Geology at the University of the West Indies, with the collaboration of the University of Geneva, held a six-week course on Analysis and Management of Geologic Risks. Drawing participants from the Caribbean, Europe and Africa, the course covered not only hazard-specific risks but also aspects of insurance, medicine and communications. The variety of inputs from participants as well as lecturers demonstrated the interdisciplinary nature of hazard research and management. For the course outline contact Dr. Barbara Carby, Department of Geography, U. of the West Indies, Mona, Kingston 7, Jamaica; fax: (809) 927-2156; e-mail: bcarby@uwimona.edu.jm ☐

## Central America: CEPREDENAC Hosts Interagency Meeting

CEPREDENAC, the Center for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America, hosted an inter-agency meeting at its headquarters in Panama to discuss a common Central American strategy to strengthen the local and municipal capacity to face disasters and identify solutions to mitigate their effects. A first step is a survey of the principal cities in the subregion to identify existing conditions in each site. IDNDR, DHA, PAHO/WHO, the Civil Protection of Panama, OFDA, the IFRC, the Municipal Federation of the Central American Isthmus (FEMICA), and La Red participated in the meeting. A Central American workshop was programmed for mid-1997. For more information contact CEPREDENAC at fax: (506) 237-1341; e-mail: cepreden@sinfo.net or the IDNDR Regional office at fax: (506) 257-2139; e-mail: hmolin@undpcos.nu.or.cr. ☐

## Ecuador: Earthquake Damage to Water Systems

More than a year ago, the province of Cotopaxi, Ecuador was struck by a magnitude 5.7 earthquake which produced serious damages to housing and infrastructure in the area. Close to 50 water systems were affected by the quake; 10 of these were rendered completely inoperable, and the remainder provided only partial service to the affected population. With funding from the German government, a case study of the aftermath of

this event identified the problems that rural water supply systems in the Andean countries face following natural disasters, from the initial design of these systems to their daily maintenance and established procedures to determine the vulnerability of water supply systems. Among the study's principal recommendations:

- security measures for designing water catchment areas and distribution networks in water supply systems that will resist the impact of earthquakes or landslides
- design recommendations for basic water supply systems
- modifications to maintenance and management procedures in these systems so as to reduce vulnerability.

This study was carried out by the Instituto Geofisico of Ecuador's National Polytechnic University. For more information contact Ing. Huyo Yepes at the Institute, Casilla 17-01-27-59, Quito, Ecuador; fax (593-2)567-874; e-mail: root@instgeof.ecx.ec. Copies of the study are available from the Regional Disaster Documentation Center (see address on page 2.) ☐

## Peru: Vulnerable Situation of Peru's Hospitals

Ten public sector hospitals in Peru are the target of a project to analyze their vulnerability—structural, non-structural, and in terms of medical preparedness—to disasters. With the financial support of the European Union's Humanitarian Office, this project will draw upon the experiences of many countries in South America, in an attempt to develop a methodology suitable for use throughout the region for evaluating the non-structural vulnerability of hospitals in seismic areas. A training component is also included in the project. More information will appear in the next issue of the Newsletter. ☐

## Results of Central American Coordinators Meeting

In our previous Newsletter, we promised to share the recommendation of the VII Subregional Technical Evaluation Meeting in Guatemala, which reviewed institutional achievements, coordination among sectors, and the status of national disaster programs in Central America over the past two years.

It is important to emphasize that significant progress has been made in all countries. However, a greater commitment is

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(from pg. 4)

required from high levels of government and from foreign sources of technical and financial support to achieve self-sufficiency. One of the most important points discussed was subregional cooperation through CEPREDENAC. Participants recommended that:

- financial sustainability be guaranteed for national disaster programs;
- follow-up be made on the objectives, conclusions and recommendations of the course on Hospital Vulnerability and Security prepared by the Hospital Maintenance engineers in Guatemala City, October 21-22, 1996;
- a methodology be developed and studies performed on structural and non-structural vulnerability of health installations;
- training courses and continuing education be given to university faculty;
- PAHO/WHO continue its technical and logistic support;
- the Meso-American University Commission be established and the date set for the first meeting to follow up on the agreements, support and promotion of disasters;
- Belize and Mexico be formally invited into the Central American Region to share and participate in all future activities concerning disasters.

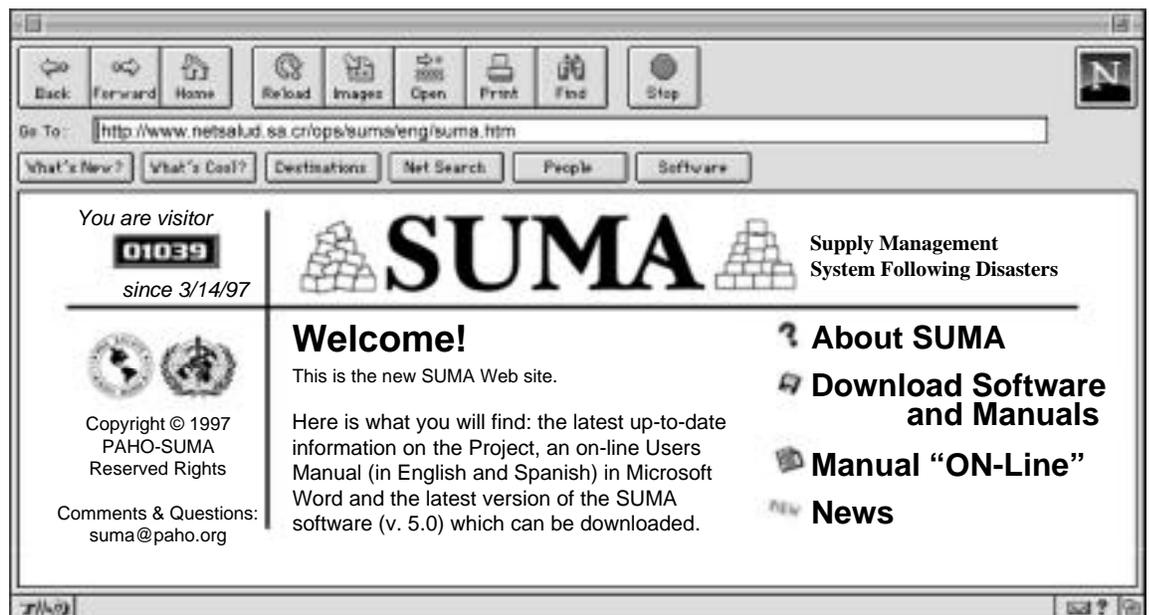
The Final Report has been delivered to the Ministries of Health and other national, subregional and intergovernmental organizations through the PAHO/WHO Representatives in each

Central American country. For a copy of the report, contact PAHO/WHO Disaster Program, Apartado Postal 3745-1000, San Jose, Costa Rica; Fax: (506) 257-2139; E-mail: perezlui@paho.org. □

## Caribbean and Latin American Countries Discuss Chemical Accidents

Technological advances in Latin America and the Caribbean have increased the production, storage, transportation and use of chemicals, and consequently, today, the risk of accidents involving dangerous substances is far greater. In spite of this reality, little has been done to create systems to prevent, mitigate or control disasters caused by chemical agents. Nor have measures been taken to prepare the health sector to face this threat. To address these issues, PAHO organized a regional symposium in November on preparedness for chemical accidents. Within the framework of the Inter-American Congress on Sanitary and Environmental Engineering, the symposium brought together 130 professionals from the Americas who proposed a Plan of Action to develop, at the national level, a Chemical Emergency Prevention, Mitigation and Preparedness Program. More news on this initiative will appear in future issues of the newsletter. □

SUMA has redesigned its Web site to allow users to download software and manuals in English and Spanish. The site is managed at the Project Office in Costa Rica. Visit SUMA soon and send your comments to [suma@paho.org](mailto:suma@paho.org)





# Review of Publications



## War and Health: Crossing the bridge to peace.

World Health Organization, Regional Office for Europe, 1996.

Since September 1992, WHO, through its European Regional Office, has been providing humanitarian assistance to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). Many lessons have been learned about preserving and promoting public health in war conditions, and WHO's annual report describes how this coordinated public health response has saved lives, supported and developed local capacities for action, and now provides a platform for reconstruction and development.

—Limited number of copies available free of charge. Contact Coordination and Humanitarian Assistance, WHO/EURO, 8 Scherfigsvej, Copenhagen, Denmark; fax: (45)3917-1818; e-mail: JET@who.dk. Also available on the WWW at <http://www.who.dk/tech/ch/armain.htm>. □

victim of a civil war, Haiti has, nonetheless suffered some of the same problems such as massive population displacements and a devastated economy. It was also the object of outside responses normally reserved for countries at war, including sanctions, an invasion of aid agencies and intense media coverage. The authors contrast and compare with other cases and expect that the study will be of particular use to policymakers and practitioners in the humanitarian, political and peacekeeping spheres, as well as policy analysts and academics.

—Print copies available for US\$8.95 from Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies, Brown University, Box 1970, Providence, RI 02912; fax: (401) 863-1270; e-mail: George\_Potter@Brown.edu. Also available on the University's Web site at: [http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Watson\\_Institute/Publications/OP23\\_front.shtm](http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Watson_Institute/Publications/OP23_front.shtm). □

**Disaster Management in the U.S. and Canada.** Richard T. Sylves and William L. Waugh, Jr. Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, 393 pp., 1996 (English only).

This is a completely revised and updated version of the book originally published in 1990. This edition adds new chapters on disaster management, which have a multidisciplinary focus and are based upon lessons learned from recent urban and rural disasters in the U.S. and Canada. The book serves as an important reference for both decision makers as well as emergency managers and those who wish to improve their knowledge of emergency and disaster management, whether from an academic standpoint, or on an operational or decision-making level.

—US\$78.95 cloth; \$49.95 paperback. Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, 2600 South First Street, Springfield, IL 62794-9265, USA. □

## Haiti Held Hostage: International Responses to the Quest for Nationhood.



This study offers an independent review of responses by the international community to the series of crises in Haiti during the last decade. While not the

*The material referred to in this section has been abstracted from review copies sent to the Editor of this Newsletter. Except where noted otherwise, none of the books is available from PAHO. The publisher and the list price (when available) are included for readers who are interested in obtaining the books.*

## Upcoming Meetings

(from pg. 3)

### 14 July-1 August

The '97 HELP course (Health Emergencies in Large Populations) will be held in two locations in the U.S. this summer: from 7-25 July at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and at the University of Hawaii. Jointly sponsored by these

universities with the International Committee of the Red Cross, HELP offers training in managing health services for victims of all types of disasters. For a course syllabus, fax any of the following: Hawaii: (808) 836-3193; Baltimore: (410) 614-1419; ICRC: (4122) 733-9674. □

## Three, two, one... Gone?

(from pg. 1)

Mexico? Where will the countries be when it comes time to evaluate the achievements of this International Decade?

The Decade's unanimously-agreed-upon agenda was clearly developmental rather than humanitarian in nature. Sustainable development, not emergency response, was the key word.

Perhaps the most important, if not uniquely relevant indicator of the Decade's success or failure is whether disaster prevention and mitigation belongs to the sectors in charge of, or instrumental in, forging ahead with the socioeconomic development of a country.

Who are the key actors, the owners of disaster prevention and mitigation at the national level? The municipalities, the Ministry of Development or Economy, the architects, engineers and urban planners, or the doctors, logisticians, and field operatives that respond to emergency situations?

It is unlikely that there will be a permanent and substantive impact on the reduction of vulnerability of any country during or after this Decade unless those institutions and sectors (including the private sector) who are instrumental in shaping

the economic development of a nation fully and formally assume responsibility for disaster prevention and mitigation.

PARLATINO, the organization of Latin America Parliaments, and PARLACEN, the Parliaments of Central America, have drafted model legislation toward this goal, and in some countries, this has been submitted to Congress or Parliament. This developmental approach has not always been fully understood and supported by the institutions that traditionally deal with disasters. Vulnerability reduction is too critical and complicated to leave to the disaster experts or the responders.

Let's hope that international agencies, national institutions and experts will join forces during the remaining three years of the International Decade to ensure that the reduction of disaster vulnerability, as a means of achieving sustainable development, indeed becomes a developmental priority rather than a simply a topic of debate, discussion and limited action among a closed circle of disaster managers and scientists.

The year 2000 will tell us whether or not we have succeeded ! □

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## All Passengers Aboard!

(from pg. 1)

developing countries are seriously under-represented. Those who should be offering opinions, making recommendations and deciding what they need in terms of communication and information exchange, are often nowhere to be seen!

Recognizing this, PAHO/WHO, together with a number of other agencies, has scheduled a high-level meeting of professionals who manage disasters and epidemics—both of which are serious public health disasters—from Latin America and the Caribbean, and from North American and European countries. The Future of Disaster and Epidemics Detection and Management: Harnessing the Power of the Internet is tentatively scheduled to take place in November 1997 in Colombia. The meeting will:

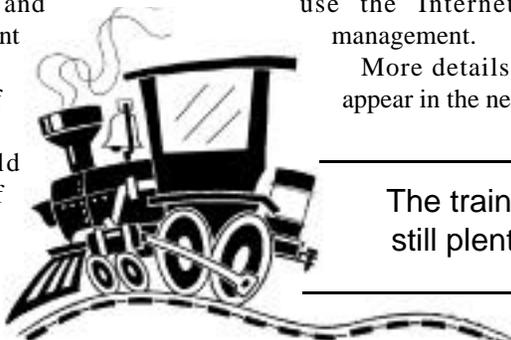
- aid the decision-making process by offering a platform to establish effective coordination and communication among national and regional organizations (public and private)
- provide a forum to discuss improving pre- and post-disaster and disease detection and management through the Internet
- identify existing electronic sources of information and gaps that still remain.
- most importantly, the meeting will yield recommendations and goals on the utilization of the Internet in crisis management.

Participants will share experiences and gain a better understanding of the need for and benefits of informal and formal communication among

themselves, particularly at the national and subregional level. This type of communication does not require significant human or financial resources nor put unreasonable demands on any organization. It does require, however, a change of attitude on the part of the highest levels regarding a free and fluid exchange of ideas and information.

The meeting will coincide with the end of the second year of a number of projects underway in the Americas (thanks to the financial support of NASA, the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration and FER, the European Federation of Networking, through the European Union). These projects have linked, through the Internet, a variety of sectors that play a regional role in disaster preparedness, mitigation and response, creating momentum for informally exchanging information across borders. They have also developed and trained a cadre of competent and contributing users who use the Internet to improve local disaster management.

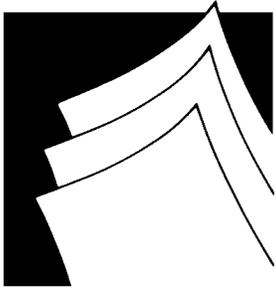
More details on this important meeting will appear in the next issue of the newsletter. □



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The train is pulling out, but there's still plenty of room. **All aboard!**

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# 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.

- T.8** Guevara, L.T.; Jones-Parra, B.; and Cardona, O.D., Método para la evaluación cualitativa de la vulnerabilidad sísmica de los aspectos no-estructurales en las edificaciones médico-asistenciales en zonas urbanas de Venezuela, Conferencia Internacional sobre Manejo de Desastres Naturales, Mérida, Venezuela, 11-14 octubre 1996.
- T.9** Bland, Susan H. et al, Long-term Psychological Effects of Natural Disasters, *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 58: 18-24, 1996.
- T.10** Lewis, C. Phuli and Aghababian, Richard V., Disaster Planning, Part I - Overview of Hospital and Emergency Department Planning for Internal and External Disasters, *Disaster Medicine*, Vol. 14, No.2, pp. 439-452, May 1996.
- U.1** Ellis, Sue and Barakat, Sultan, From Relief to Development: The long-term Effects of Temporary Accommodation on Refugees and Displaced Persons in the Republic of Croatia, *Disasters*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp.111-124.
- U.2** Stockton, Nicholas, Defensive Development? Re-examining the Role of the Military in Complex Political Emergencies, *Disasters*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 144-148.
- U.3** Cano Torres, Orlando, Sistema de información en desastres y emergencias, pp. 1-109, 1995.

*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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