



Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, San José, Costa Rica

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION



Courtesy of the Cali Volunteer Firefighters Corps

Firefighter brigade leaders from throughout Latin America participate in the USAID/OFDA-supported regional forum on integral fire management.

Colombia Hosts Regional Fire Management Forum

Each year, wildfires destroy millions of hectares in Latin America. In the past decade, increased land use, population expansion, and climate change have made wildfire prevention and control more challenging.

The good news is that during the same period, Latin American countries have all developed better policies, strategies, and plans for integral fire management, while also improving technical capabilities and securing better firefighting equipment.

To help key actors exchange experiences and lessons learned in fire management, as well as to help strengthen national and regional programs, USAID/OFDA, Colombia's

National Disaster Risk Management Unit, and the Cali Volunteer Firefighters Corps recently held the Latin American Integral Fire Management Forum.

Approximately 100 firefighter brigade leaders, program managers, emergency authorities, and other representatives from 15 countries in Latin America participated in the forum, held April 4 and 5 in Cali, Colombia. In addition, approximately 800 individuals participated in the virtual forum online.

The event included presentations on national fire management legislation and programs, as well as

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USAID/OFDA promotes the use of forest fire prevention mascots, such as Costa Rica's Toño Pizote, to aid firefighters in educating the public. Toño Pizote was recently the star of the show during Bolivia's firefighter brigade mobilization exercise.



Photo by Scarlett Ortiz, USAID/OFDA

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Bolivia Holds Forest Firefighter Brigade Mobilization Exercise

Bolivia held its Fourth International Forest Firefighter Brigade Mobilization Exercise from April 18 to 21 in Santa Cruz. More than 250 firefighters from across Bolivia, as well as from Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Peru, participated.

Firefighters exchanged experiences and lessons learned, participated in a fire prevention awareness parade, and competed in obstacle course, defense line, and machete contests. The Bolivian Air Force's Santa Cruz Search and Rescue Group took first place in the overall competition.

USAID/OFDA supported the participation of Costa Rican firefighters, who were accompanied by *Toño Pizote*, their official fire prevention mascot.

During the event, USAID/Bolivia donated 900 pairs of fire retardant pants, valued at \$30,000, to support forest conservation efforts in Santa Cruz.



Photo by Scarlett Ortiz, USAID/OFDA

Officials inaugurate Bolivia's Fourth Forest Firefighter Brigade Mobilization Exercise.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

USAID/OFDA Supports Fire Management Guide in Quechua

In March, USAID/OFDA and Peru's National Civil Defense Institute (INDECI), in collaboration with Cusco local government agencies, produced a forest fire management guide in the Quechua language.

The new guide is part of inter-institutional efforts to strengthen the capacities of Quechua-speaking communities in the Cusco region that are prone to forest fires. Planned activities include local fire management trainings and technical assistance to form community firefighter brigades.

As part of its regional disaster risk reduction (DRR) plan, USAID/OFDA supports DRR activities in culturally unique populations, such as those around Cusco.

Regional Fire Management Forum

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recent forest fire emergencies in Ecuador, Chile, and Mexico.

The forum also included group discussions and recommendations on topics such as increasing community, local government, and private sector involvement in wildfire management, improving fire prevention education and early warning systems, and strengthening volunteer firefighting programs.

Participants also reviewed key elements of successful fire management programs, the development of training and operational standards for firefighters, and the creation of national or regional fire brigade accreditation systems.

Finally, participants made suggestions for how USAID/OFDA could continue to best support countries' efforts to advance their national fire management programs.

Through the Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP), for the past 15 years USAID/OFDA has provided fire management training and technical assistance and helped to establish or strengthen national fire management programs, policies, and plans in Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay.

Emphasis is placed on institutional strengthening, outreach and community support, and capacity building.

USAID/OFDA training includes techniques for community-level firefighting, basic and advanced training for forest firefighters, effective use of water to extinguish forest fires, and training in the incident command system.

Technical assistance is provided for the development of national fire management policies, strategies and plans, as well as the development and implementation of institutional protocols and operational procedures.

USAID/OFDA also helps countries carry out forest firefighter brigade mobilization exercises. In recent years, national mobilization exercises have taken place in Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Paraguay.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Grant Supports Water Quality in Chile

With funding from the RDAP Small Grants Program, the Chilean chapter of the Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA) is working to improve water quality and hygiene practices in the commune of Petorca, in the Valparaiso Region of Chile.

Petorca, which spans an area of just over 1,500 square kilometers, has a population of about 10,000 people. Half of area residents live in urban areas and half in rural areas.

As part of the USAID/OFDA-supported project, ADRA/Chile will implement DRR strategies to improve the health of residents affected by water shortages. Strategies include analyzing and improving water quality and storage methods and promoting better hygiene practices among families.

The project will provide mobile water quality analysis equipment and associated training to community volunteers. The project will also host workshops to review best hygiene and water-use practices.

The \$30,000, community-level DRR project is scheduled to begin on June 20, 2013, and extend for nine months.



**ADRA/Chile
Director Jorge
Ale and RDAP
DRR Specialist
Eduardo
Gutiérrez shake
hands after
signing the small
grant agreement.**

Photo by Mariela Chavarriga, USAID/OFDA

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

FIU Holds Course on Data Preparation

With USAID/OFDA support, Florida International University (FIU) recently offered a four-month online course to university faculty and DRR practitioners on Geographic Information Systems and Remote Sensing in Data Preparation for DRR.

Following the course, 12 selected individuals participated in a follow-up hands-on Workshop in Data Preparation, held from March 12 to 15 at the FIU Biscayne Bay Campus in Miami, Florida.

The training modules and workshop are intended to introduce students to approaches for deriving necessary parameters of specific hazard models from remotely sensed data or their derivatives. The goal is to provide alternative approaches and guide users in the decision-making process regarding the choice of methods and potential data sources for use in DRR programming.

Individuals from Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay participated in the course and workshop.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Mexican USAR Leaders Meet in Jalisco

Urban search-and-rescue (USAR) team leaders from across Mexico recently gathered in Guadalajara, Jalisco State, to share experiences and lessons learned, exchange response plans, and coordinate matters related to search-and-rescue in collapsed structures. USAID/OFDA supported the meeting, held on April 12 and 13.

Participants included USAR leaders from Jalisco and Baja California states, as well as the Federal District, the Guadalajara, Zapopan, and Puerta Vallarta fire departments, and representatives from the National Civil Protection System, the Mexican Red Cross, and RDAP.

Regional School Safety Workshop Held

USAID/OFDA recently organized a Regional School Safety Workshop with RDAP disaster risk management specialists and certified instructors of the USAID/OFDA-supported School Safety Course.

During the meeting, participants from 12 countries exchanged experiences and lessons learned in promoting school safety at all educational levels. They strengthened their knowledge of specific themes, such as preparing institutional emergency response plans, training students in risk management, and fostering DRR activities in the local community.

Participants also reviewed the School Safety Course training materials and provided recommendations for updating and improving the curriculum.

The workshop was held in Panama City, from March 20 to 22.

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