



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

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS



Photo by Robert Dunsmore, USAID/OFDA

U.S. Southern Command representatives visit the USAID/OFDA warehouse in Miami, Florida, to see stockpiled emergency relief supplies.

USAID/OFDA Ready for Hurricane Season

Although USAID/OFDA helps countries respond to disasters year-round, particular emphasis is given each year to preparing for the Atlantic Basin hurricane season (from June 1 to November 30).

The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has forecast a near-normal Atlantic Basin hurricane season this year. On May 24, NOAA predicted that up to 15 named storms will form in the Atlantic Basin during the 2012 season, of which four to eight are expected to become hurricanes and one to three could develop into major hurricanes (Category Three or higher on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale). Based on the

1981-2010 period, an average season has 12 named storms, including six hurricanes (three of which are major).

"Regardless of the forecast, we must always be prepared for floods, storms, and hurricanes. Before hurricane season, USAID/OFDA works with countries throughout the Caribbean region to strengthen local disaster management capacities. Additionally, we have standard operating procedures for multiple scenarios involving hurricanes that allow us to respond quickly and efficiently as appropriate," explained USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan.

Callaghan and four other re-

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USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan looks at a map inside the St. Vincent Emergency Operations Center during the response to Hurricane Thomas in late 2010.



Photo by Cecil Shillingford, USAID/OFDA

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

USAID/OFDA Supports Brazil's Civil Defense on U.S. Exchange

With support from USAID/OFDA, five officials from Brazil's Federal Civil Defense spent a week in early May in Miami, Florida, visiting emergency response and disaster risk management specialists from the public and private sector.

The purpose of the visit was to learn how the United States integrates community-based organizations, universities, and private enterprise into the national and state response framework, strengthening capacities to mitigate, respond, and recover from disasters. Brazilian officials toured the emergency operations center at Miami-Dade Fire & Rescue, the hurricane research laboratory at Florida International University, and Home Depot, among others. They also visited the USAID/OFDA warehouse in Miami.



Photo by Antonio Pinheiro, USAID/OFDA

Members of Brazil's Federal Civil Defense visit the Miami-Dade Fire & Rescue headquarters.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

RDAP Supports DRR Forum With Costa Rican Universities

On April 17, USAID/OFDA held a forum with representatives from Costa Rica's National Risk Prevention and Emergency Response Commission, National Council of University Rectors, National Accreditation System for Higher Education, State of the Nation program, and the country's four state universities, to discuss the role of higher education in disaster risk reduction (DRR).

Participants identified ways the entities might collaborate better to strengthen risk management, both in their curricula and at an institutional level.

USAID/OFDA also presented participants with copies of the USAID/OFDA-supported book "Education and Risk Management: An Experience Worth Sharing."

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Firefighter Mobilization Exercises Held

Through RDAP, USAID/OFDA recently provided technical assistance to Bolivia and Paraguay to strengthen forest firefighter brigade capacities through mobilization exercises.

Bolivia's Third Firefighter Brigade Mobilization Exercise took place in Santa Cruz City from April 9 to 11.

Approximately 200 firefighters from 19 brigades, including the first all-woman forest firefighter brigade from the Municipality of Santa Cruz, participated in the event. The Santa Cruz departmental and municipal governments, along with nearly two dozen private businesses, supported the event.

Paraguay's Second Forest Firefighter Brigade Mobilization Exercise took place in the Tati Yupi Natural Refuge, in Hernadarias, from March 23 to 25.

Twelve brigades participated in the event, which was organized by Paraguay's National Emergency Secretariat and Volunteer Firefighters Corps.

USAID/OFDA DRMSes Luisa Alfaro and Carlos Córdova provided technical assistance for both exercises.

Participants of the USAID/OFDA Effective Use of Water Course instructor training, held earlier this year in Colombia, included firefighters from Bolivia and Paraguay.



Photo by Luisa Alfaro, USAID/OFDA

USAID/OFDA Prepared for Hurricane Season

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gional advisors – experienced, multilingual disaster management professionals with broad knowledge of the region's potential hazards, geography, and cultural and socio-economic characteristics – are based at the USAID/OFDA regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in San José, Costa Rica.

These advisors – along with a humanitarian assistance advisor to the military, two information officers, a communications officer, and 20 disaster risk management specialists (DRMSes) – are available for immediate deployment in case of a disaster. In addition, USAID/OFDA maintains a network of 330 on-call local surge capacity consultants who can be activated to quickly augment USAID/OFDA's assessment and response capacity. The DRMSes and local surge capacity consultants are the backbone of the USAID/OFDA-supported Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP), which provides training and technical assistance in DRR and response preparedness to national disaster organizations and first responders in the region.

The USAID/OFDA field office in Haiti, which has two program officers and an administrative support staff, remains ready to respond to adverse events in that country – including hurricanes and other tropical storms – as appropriate. USAID/OFDA also maintains two humanitarian assistance advisors at the U.S. Southern Command in Miami, Florida, who help coordinate USAID and U.S. Department of Defense emergency humanitarian assistance in the LAC region.

In the event of an impending hurricane, USAID/OFDA may pre-deploy staff in consultation with U.S. embassies and USAID missions in affected countries. The regional office also assigns staff to Bridgetown, Barbados, on a rotating schedule from July to November to provide USAID/OFDA preparedness and response coverage for the Caribbean during hurricane season.

USAID/OFDA continually replenishes stockpiled emergency relief supplies – including plastic sheeting for temporary shelters, water treatment units, water containers, hygiene kits, kitchen supplies, and blankets – for rapid shipment from the USAID/OFDA warehouse in Miami, Florida, to the LAC region in the event of a disaster. Earlier this year, USAID/OFDA also pre-positioned emergency relief supplies in Haiti. USAID/OFDA may purchase supplies locally as appropriate.

USAID/OFDA maintains agreements with charter air service companies in the region to ensure timely transportation of staff and supplies to disaster-affected areas. If commercial service is not available, USAID/OFDA may also request logistical assistance from the U.S. military.

In advance of hurricane season, as in years past, the LAC regional office briefed mission disaster relief officers and emergency action committees at U.S. embassies and USAID missions throughout the region, and met with key partners and other donors to coordinate hurricane preparedness activities.



Photo by Clive Lorde, USAID/OFDA

Palms in the city of Nassau bend in the wind as Hurricane Irene passes through northwestern Bahamas in late August 2011.

COMING UP

RDAP Review and Planning Meeting

RDAP managers and thematic DRMSes who cover education, disaster risk reduction, urban search-and-rescue, fire management, incident command system, and pre-hospital care, will participate in the regional thematic review and planning meeting scheduled from June 12 to 15 in Costa Rica. Participants will review activities to date and plan activities for the upcoming year.

Caribbean Tradewinds Exercise

USAID/OFDA staff will participate in the 2012 Tradewinds Exercise, organized by the U.S. Southern Command in coordination with the Caribbean Emergency Disaster Management Agency. The event will be held from June 13 to 22 in Barbados.

Launch of Peruvian Firefighters Academy

USAID/OFDA representatives will participate in the inauguration of the National Firefighters Academy in Peru, scheduled for June 22. For the past several months, DRMS Dante Torres has provided technical assistance to the Government of Peru to establish the academy, which will incorporate USAID/OFDA training courses into the curriculum.

JHOC for U.S. Military Staff in Hispaniola

USAID/OFDA will conduct a Joint Humanitarian Operations Course (JHOC) in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on June 26 and 27. The JHOC will provide U.S. military staff in Haiti and the Dominican Republic with an overview of USAID/OFDA disaster response and preparedness capabilities, to improve coordination for future joint disaster response operations.

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