



## 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 Pedro Soto, USAID/OFDA

*Participants of a USAID/OFDA-supported Collapsed Structures Rescue Course, Light Level (CSRC-LL) work together during a field exercise in Toluca, Mexico, in January 2011.*

### Strengthening USAR Capabilities

USAID/OFDA has renewed its commitment to helping countries throughout Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) strengthen their national urban search-and-rescue (USAR) capabilities.

USAID/OFDA's regional USAR training and technical assistance program focuses on building the capacities of local and national USAR teams, strengthening national USAR systems, and ensuring that countries are prepared to receive international USAR assistance.

The USAR systems include USAR teams and their supporting in-

stitutions as well as agencies that uphold construction standards and manage urban planning. The presence of these agencies facilitates the incorporation of disaster risk reduction (DRR) concepts into urban planning processes.

USAID/OFDA's regional program also helps governments take advantage of networking opportunities so that authorities and experts can share USAR research, organizational models, and lessons learned.

Staff from the USAID/OFDA/LAC regional office recently met with

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*Participants of the first USAID/OFDA-supported CSRC-LL in St. Lucia, held in October 2010.*



Photo by Clive Lorde, USAID/OFDA

### DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

#### USAID/OFDA SRA Hands Over INSARAG Americas Leadership

On December 31, USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor (SRA) Tim Callaghan handed over the reins of the Americas regional chapter of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) to colleagues from Costa Rica and Mexico, who will co-chair the INSARAG Regional Group of the Americas during 2012.

"USAID/OFDA/LAC wishes the new chairs much success as they move forward," Callaghan said. "We fully support INSARAG's goals and activities, especially the component of capacity building for national teams."

SRA Callaghan and his predecessor, the late USAID/OFDA/LAC SRA Paul Bell, have chaired INSARAG Americas for the past 10 years.

During Bell's leadership, from 2001 to  
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Photo by Aurliana Koutnik, USAID/OFDA

*Costa Rican USAR team members participate in a USAID/OFDA- and INSARAG-supported national USAR exercise in late 2009.*

### DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

#### USAID/OFDA Supports Regional USAR Exercise in Guatemala

USAID/OFDA is supporting a regional USAR exercise to be held in Guatemala City from April 19 to 22.

Teams from Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Panama plan to participate. USAID/OFDA is contributing \$50,000 to support the exercise and for the donation of specialized equipment.

The exercise, organized by Guatemala's National Disaster Management Coordinator, will be an opportunity for USAR teams to evaluate their disaster response operations.

## DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

### RDAP Meets with Local Stakeholders

The USAID/OFDA Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP), which provides DRR training and technical assistance, as well as disaster response assistance throughout LAC, has organized a series of meetings with partners and other stakeholders in the countries covered by the program.

The RDAP held its first stakeholder meeting of the year in El Salvador on February 7. More than 80 people from 30 public and private organizations attended the meeting, including the Government of El Salvador's Civil Protection Agency and the Salvadorean Red Cross Society. USAID/OFDA disaster risk management specialist (DRMS) Sergio David Gutiérrez organized the event.

Upcoming stakeholder meetings will take place in Guatemala on February 22, organized by DRMS Ricardo Berganza; in Costa Rica on March 20 and Honduras on March 26, organized by DRMS Fernando Calderón; in Chile on March 20, organized by DRMS Mariela Chavarriga; in Paraguay on March 24, organized by DRMS Carlos Córdova; and in the Dominican Republic on March 28, organized by DRMS Berganza.



Photo by David Ernesto Gutiérrez, USAID/OFDA

*Participants of the annual RDAP stakeholder meeting in El Salvador, held in early February.*



Photo by Olivier Joseph, USAID/OFDA

**USAID/OFDA-supported USAR experts from Fairfax County Fire and Rescue, in the U.S. state of Virginia, teach USAR techniques to volunteer firefighters in Haiti.**

## Helping to Strengthen USAR Capabilities

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USAR focal points from each of the participating countries, during three sub-regional meetings held in Florianópolis, Brazil, for South American colleagues; Antigua, Guatemala, for Central American colleagues; and Freeport, Bahamas, for Caribbean colleagues.

During the December and January meetings, representatives from the countries discussed their national priorities and future plans for USAR system development.

"These sub-regional meetings provided us with quite a bit of information about different countries' strengths and weaknesses regarding USAR capabilities and the challenges they face, which will help USAID/OFDA develop our USAR training and technical assistance program to better serve countries' needs," said René Carrillo, who helps coordinate USAID/OFDA's USAR support in the LAC region. "This information will be incorporated into our work plans."

USAID/OFDA's support to LAC countries includes the following spectrum of activities: an analysis of USAR needs, assistance with forming a national USAR technical review committee, establishment of a USAR training program, support in preparing training sites and obtaining specialized equipment, assistance with USAR team self-evaluation and accreditation processes, and promotion of sectorial integration (including government, private, academic, scientific, and construction) within the national USAR system.

In recent years, USAID/OFDA has signed technical agreements with the governments of Peru, the Dominican Republic, and El Salvador to strengthen national USAR capacities. USAID/OFDA expects to sign additional agreements with other countries to expand training and technical assistance opportunities.

USAID/OFDA will continue to support LAC countries with human and financial resources to carry out specialized USAR training, national and regional exercises to evaluate and improve USAR capacities, and technical assistance to strengthen institutional bases and ensure the long-term sustainability of USAR systems as part of national emergency systems.

## DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

### INSARAG Americas Accomplishments

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2003, INSARAG Americas and USAID/OFDA promoted collapsed structures rescue training for Latin American firefighters and other first responders.

Through the years, with USAID/OFDA's continued leadership and support, INSARAG Americas helped countries in the LAC region to build and strengthen USAR national capacities, prepare to receive international USAR support, and strengthen legal, administrative, logistical, and operational bases to develop an institutional platform for the national USAR system.

During Callaghan's leadership, from 2003 to 2011, the regional group hosted annual INSARAG Americas conferences; participated in INSARAG global meetings and activities; translated INSARAG documents of interest to the region, including the INSARAG Guidelines, into Spanish; supported several regional work groups, including one to develop performance standards for canine search and rescue; and supported three national USAR exercises and two regional earthquake simulation drills in 2009 and 2010.

Additionally, INSARAG Americas developed a USAR team accreditation process for small- and medium-sized teams, and effort that led to the global adoption of INSARAG standards for national USAR team training and capacity building.

During his tenure, Callaghan relied on an Advisory Group made up of USAR experts from across the region to assist him in guiding INSARAG Americas' priorities.

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FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

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