



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

### DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

## Latin American Countries Adopt the Incident Command System

USAID/OFDA is providing assistance to 16 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) that are implementing the Incident Command System (ICS).

The ICS is a predefined chain of command first employed in the U.S. state of California in the 1970s in response to extensive forest fires. The system helps response personnel – firefighters, police, medical staff, and others – collaborate more effectively during responses to emergency situations.

“USAID/OFDA is helping strengthen the capacities of first response organizations and supporting countries in their efforts to establish procedures and protocols for managing emergencies,” explained disaster management specialist María Luisa Alfaro, who oversees the ICS component of the USAID/OFDA Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP).

The ICS project has its roots in a USAID/OFDA survey conducted in the early 1990s that suggested the region’s emergency response institutions had various organizational and operational deficiencies when it came to responding to disasters. USAID/OFDA launched its ICS project in May 2003 and today assists Argentina, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil,

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Photos by Dante Torres, USAID/OFDA

**The province of Cuzco, Peru, implemented the USAID/OFDA-promoted Incident Command System for the first time in June during the Inti Raymi Sun Festival.**

### DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

## Disaster Assistance Program Staff Meet in Costa Rica



Photo by Ricardo Herrera, USAID/OFDA

**USAID/OFDA regional advisors, disaster management specialists, administrative staff, and key partners shared their ideas during the annual RDAP planning meeting this month.**

Staff from the USAID/OFDA Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP) met in Guanacaste, Costa Rica, from August 3 to 6 to plan program activities for the coming year.

USAID/OFDA staff from Washington, D.C. and the regional office in San Jose and 21 disaster risk management specialists from throughout the LAC region reviewed program achievements during the past six years, discussed ideas for implementing the LAC regional strategy, met with key partners, and planned ways to increase USAID/OFDA’s response capabilities in the LAC region.

Additionally, participants agreed to develop plans for improved monitoring and evaluation of RDAP achievements.

### DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

## USAID/OFDA Provides Funds To Belize for Relief Supplies

In late July, USAID/OFDA provided \$10,000 to Belize to pre-position emergency relief supplies in preparation for the 2009 hurricane season.

The funds were provided to the National Emergency Management Office and the Belize Red Cross and will be used for the local purchase of hygiene and cleaning supplies, first aid kits, flashlights, spare batteries, and related items for 20 emergency shelters.

Tim Callaghan, USAID/OFDA senior regional advisor, met with staff from the two organizations in early June to inform them of USAID/OFDA disaster response, preparedness, and risk reduction programs in the region.

# The Incident Command System

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Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela with 23 different processes to implement the ICS.

Implementation of the ICS processes varies greatly, as some began in 2003 and others just last year. For example, the Cali Volunteer Firefighters Corps in Colombia and the Firefighters Corps of El Salvador have succeeded in training 100 percent of their staff and recently finalized their institutional procedures manuals, while other organizations working to implement the ICS have trained approximately 5 percent of their personnel so far.

RDAP technical manager Fabian Arellano points to the Cali Volunteer Firefighters Corps' adoption of USAID/OFDA training standards as a significant example of the project's success.

"The Cali Volunteer Firefighters Corps has just published its 2009 Operative Procedures Manual on the organization's website ([www.bomberoscali.org](http://www.bomberoscali.org)) with an introduction recognizing USAID/OFDA's role in creating the manual. Additionally, the organization recently adopted norms requiring the completion of USAID/OFDA-designed courses in order to work as a volunteer firefighter as well



Photo by Sergio David Gutierrez, USAID/OFDA



Courtesy El Salvador Firefighters



Courtesy Guayaquil Firefighters Academy

*Left, participants of the intermediate ICS course held in El Salvador in mid-June; above right, El Salvador firefighters receive their new procedures manual in early July; below right, USAID/OFDA monitors a basic ICS course at the Guayaquil Firefighters Academy in mid-July.*

as to be eligible for promotion within the corps," Arellano explained.

Last month, in response to the increasing interest of the region's states, provinces, municipalities, and individual response agencies in adopting the ICS, USAID/OFDA published its "Guide for Orienting the Implementation of the ICS Process in Latin America and the Caribbean." The guide, available in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, provides an overview of the five phases recommended for implementing an ICS process: approximation, construction of the base line, training, implementation, and consolidation and follow-up.

USAID/OFDA provides training to interested parties who have committed to implementing the ICS. Training packages include information for leaders, basic and intermediate ICS courses, specialization workshops, and courses for local instructors to provide the ICS courses to ensure the ICS process becomes self-sustaining.

The two-day basic ICS course provides first responders with an overview of the system and how it works. The more advanced four-day ICS course is geared toward decision-makers and provides participants with the capabilities necessary to apply the system during large-scale events. It covers ICS principles and structure, installations, resources, expansion and contraction of the structure, the incident action plan, mobilization, demobilization, and closure.

During the past five years, 9,547 men and women from throughout Latin America and the Caribbean have successfully completed the basic ICS course, and more than 2,895 participants have taken the intermediate ICS course. Additionally, USAID/OFDA has trained 262 instructors to provide the basic course and 89 instructors to provide the intermediate course.

## COMING UP

### INSARAG Americas Advisory Committee

USAID/OFDA is helping to organize the upcoming meeting of the advisory committee of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) Regional Group of the Americas, scheduled for August 18 to 20 in Panama.

USAID/OFDA senior regional advisor Tim Callaghan, the INSARAG Americas chairman, will preside over the meeting. Participants will review the annual work plan and discuss the agenda of the 2009 INSARAG Americas annual meeting scheduled for October 28 and 29 in Guadalajara, Mexico.

### National USAR Mobilization Exercises

USAID/OFDA is providing technical assistance and funding for the national urban search and rescue (USAR) team mobilization exercise in Guatemala on September 25 and 26. USAID/OFDA will also support USAR mobilization exercises scheduled to take place in Colombia from October 9 to 12 and in Mexico from November 27 to 30.

## DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

### Tsunami Warning Project Advances

A USAID/OFDA-supported Caribbean tsunami early warning system is moving forward with the adaptation of generic tsunami warning protocols to the particular needs and realities of Caribbean nations.

The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA), which executes the warning system project, carried out protocol adaptation workshops in Barbados from June 29 to 30, Antigua from July 7 to 8, and Jamaica from July 16 to 17. The first of the four workshops took place in Grenada in April.

Now, project leaders expect to roll out the model protocol to the other 14 CDERA participating states, according to USAID/OFDA disaster risk management specialist Clive Lorde, who helped facilitate the workshop in Barbados.

USAID/OFDA regional advisor Julie Leonard, who attended the Barbados workshop, said "The turnout was incredible. More than 50 participants attended, and were so engaged in the topic that the discussion continued into the evening."

Audrey Mullings, USAID/OFDA disaster risk management specialist in Jamaica, reported the meeting in that country had excellent outcomes, including recommendations for additional risk assessment and hazard mapping; development of infrastructure to deal with seismic, sea-level, and early warning communication; and strengthening tsunami emergency management mechanisms beyond warning and evacuation.

*Emergency officials, community leaders, and private-sector representatives participate in the tsunami protocol adaptation workshop held in Jamaica.*



Photo by Audrey Mullings, USAID/OFDA

## Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean

Tel: (011-506) 2290-4133

E-mail: [ofdalac@ofda.gov](mailto:ofdalac@ofda.gov)

Internet: [www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov)

Keyword: ofdalac



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