



Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance

DISASTER CASE REPORT

Agency for
International
Development

Washington D.C.
20523

MEXICO - Volcanic Eruption

Date: March 28 - April 4, 1982 (FY 82)
Location: Southern Mexican state of Chiapas
No. Dead: Hundreds
No. Affected: 20,000-25,000 evacuated from area
Damage: Extensive damage to agricultural crops and buildings

The Disaster

The volcano El Chichon, which is in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, erupted at 11:32 p.m. local time on March 28, 1982. El Chichon is located at coordinates 17° 20' N, 93° 12' W at an altitude of 1,350 m. Some volcanic activity continued for several days, when the volcano again erupted violently on the evening of April 2, 1982. These eruptions represented the most significant and destructive volcanic activity in Mexico since 1952. Scientists reported that the stratospheric volcanic cloud produced by El Chichon was the largest observed in two decades.

The area affected by the volcano comprised 40,000 hectares used primarily for coffee growing and cattle grazing. The eruption covered the town of Pichucalco, located 40 km from El Chichon, with 30 cm of ash. The second eruption produced pyroclastic flows, which can be extremely destructive because of their high temperatures and high velocities. These flows destroyed or heavily damaged villages within a seven-km radius. Two towns which completely disappeared under volcanic ash were Francisco de Leon and El Naranjo.

The pyroclastic flows also dammed the Rio Magdalena and created a lake of hot water five km long. The failure of this natural dam on May 26, 1982 caused a destructive flood.

Scientists believe it is unlikely that the Chichonal volcano will erupt again in the near future. Study of the pre-1982 deposits indicated that the last pyroclastic eruption occurred in 1852.

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Action Taken by the Government of Mexico (GOM)

The Mexican Army helped evacuate up to 25,000 people from the stricken region and provided shelter, food, and medical care. The Mexican Red Cross treated the injured and provided staff for three shelters which had been established in the towns of Villahermosa and Coatzacoalcos.

Evacuees who came from areas not totally devastated were able to return to their homes within several weeks. The GOM provided sheet roofing to rebuild damaged housing. For those whose villages were completely destroyed -- many of whom were Zoque Indians -- the GOM secured land in various parts of Chiapas for ten relocation sites. These sites are: Nuevo Guerrero, Chancalan, Nuevo Naranjo (this replaced El Naranjo and was built on 17 hectares provided by the state of Chiapas), Guayabal, Carmen Tonapac, Esquipulas, Volcan, La Cascada, Chapultenango, and Francisco de Leon (this was built at a new site to replace the destroyed Francisco de Leon).

Assistance Provided by The United States Government (USG)

On July 8, 1982, Ambassador John Gavin determined that a disaster situation existed and authorized funds to aid Mexican relief efforts. A total of \$50,000 was contributed; \$49,000 in cash was presented to the Mexican Red Cross and \$1,000 was given to the general coordinator of reconstruction programs for the redevelopment of areas affected by El Chichon.

TOTAL \$50,000

Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies *

Catholic Relief Services - provided \$15,000 in cash to the Catholic Church in the affected area.

TOTAL \$15,000

Assistance Provided by the International Community

None reported.

* Please note: the listings of assistance provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies are compiled from reports submitted voluntarily to OFDA. It is not always possible to verify the accuracy of these reports, nor the dollar value of in-kind contributions. As a result, the total dollar values indicated in these sections should be taken as representative figures.