



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

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Caribbean Red Cross Program Transitions into Second Phase

A USAID/OFDA-supported Red Cross program to strengthen disaster preparedness in the Caribbean concluded its first phase in August and will begin phase two in October.

The program, "Readiness to Respond: Increased Disaster Preparedness through Enhanced Coordination and Community Awareness," is a joint effort between USAID/OFDA, the American Red Cross, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and Caribbean Red Cross societies.

USAID/OFDA provided more than \$550,000 in support of the 18-month phase one of the program, focused on Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and St. Lucia, where more than 7,000 people were trained in preparedness and response skills.

"This training was put to the test when the
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Photo courtesy of the Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross Society
Red Cross volunteers in Trinidad conduct a vulnerability and capacity assessment to address major risks in the neighborhood.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Disaster Assistance Program Announces Changes in Coverage

In August, the Regional Disaster Assistance Program announced changes in the oversight of USAID/OFDA activities in two Caribbean countries. Disaster Risk Management Specialist (DRMS) Ricardo Berganza, who covers Guatemala, now also covers the Dominican Republic. Berganza assumed responsibility from DRMS Manuel Santana, who continues to cover Panama and Venezuela. DRMS Audrey Mullings will now oversee activities in St. Kitts and Nevis, in place of Beryl Armbrister. Mullings also covers Jamaica and Grenada, while Armbrister continues to cover the Bahamas, St. Lucia, and Belize.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS



Photo by Clive Lorde, USAID/OFDA

The Caribbean Disaster Response Unit conducts an annual training in Antigua and Barbuda in April. Below, the Colombian Red Cross, Cundinamarca Chapter, conducts a field exercise as part of the process to obtain accreditation from INSARAG Americas as a light-level team.

Strengthening Urban Search and Rescue

USAID/OFDA provides urban search and rescue (USAR) teams in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) with specialized training and technical assistance with accreditation processes in collaboration with the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG), a global network of more than 80 countries and disaster response organizations under the United Nations umbrella.

During the past decade, hundreds of firefighters, Red Cross workers, and others have completed courses in USAR techniques as well as in the Incident Command System and medical and hazardous materials first response.

In addition to specialized training, the USAID/OFDA-supported Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP) focuses on helping to build USAR team capacities. Toward this end, USAID/OFDA specialists along with experts from the Los Angeles, California, and Fairfax, Virginia, national USAR teams assist

LAC teams who have begun the process to obtain official USAR accreditation from the INSARAG Regional Group of the Americas.

To date, one team, the Cundinamarca Chapter of the Colombian Red Cross, has obtained INSARAG Americas accreditation as a light-level USAR team, and seven others in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela have begun the process to obtain accreditation. INSARAG has identified another 29 teams in the region as potential candidates for accreditation.

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Photo courtesy of the Colombian Red Cross

COMING UP

SHARE Guatemala Project Launch

USAID/OFDA representatives will travel to Guatemala on September 24 to help launch the USAID/OFDA-funded SHARE Guatemala project developed in collaboration with CARE and Catholic Relief Services. The \$1.2 million project will strengthen municipal level disaster risk management in Guatemala, through training and capacity building in first response, shelter improvement and management, and disaster coordination.

National USAR Mobilization Exercises

USAID/OFDA is providing technical assistance and funding for the national USAR mobilization exercise in Guatemala on September 25 and 26.

USAID/OFDA will also support USAR mobilization exercises scheduled in Colombia from October 8 to 12 and Mexico from November 27 to 30.

INSARAG Americas Annual Meeting

USAID/OFDA is providing logistical assistance and funding for the annual meeting of the INSARAG Regional Group for the Americas, scheduled to take place on October 28 and 29 in Guadalajara, Mexico.

In addition, USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan, chairman of INSARAG Americas, will participate in the annual meeting of INSARAG Asia/Europe/ Middle East, scheduled for October 1 and 2 in Hungary.



Members of Nicaragua's National Firefighters Corps participate in a USAID/OFDA urban search and rescue course in August 2007.

Photo by Sergio David Gutiérrez, USAID/OFDA

USAID/OFDA Supports USAR Teams

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Accreditation is an INSARAG Americas initiative adopted in 2003 to promote the quality of light and medium-level USAR groups in the region. The goal of the voluntary technical process is to ensure the quality of administrative, logistic, and operational levels.

USAID/OFDA supports INSARAG Americas with these efforts and provides funding for other INSARAG Americas activities. In association with INSARAG, USAID/OFDA will provide technical assistance and funding for national USAR mobilization exercises in Guatemala, Colombia, and Mexico (see "Coming Up" section at left).

"The purpose of these exercises is threefold: to help demonstrate the capacity of local USAR teams; to help the teams learn to operate within the structure of their national emergency response system; and to promote support for the regional INSARAG Americas group," explained Manuel Santana, a USAID/OFDA disaster management specialist who oversees the USAR training and technical assistance component of the RDAP.

USAID/OFDA support for USAR training programs first began in the mid-1990s, when USAID/OFDA and the Miami-Dade Fire Rescue Department in Florida developed and began to provide a Spanish-language urban search and rescue course (*Búsqueda y Rescate en Estructuras Colapsadas - BREC*) in response to identified training needs in the region. In 2005, recognizing that the BREC was geared more toward medium-level USAR teams, the Colombian Red Cross began to develop a USAR course geared toward light-level teams (*Curso de Rescate en Estructuras Colapsadas, Nivel Liviano - CRECL*). This course became part of the RDAP training portfolio in 2006 and was translated into English in 2008 for use in the Caribbean.

Last year, working with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), USAID/OFDA began to provide USAR training and technical assistance to Caribbean nations seeking to form USAR teams. Today, five countries have small USAR teams whose members are prepared to deploy as part of a larger regional team to respond as needed in CDEMA nations. To ensure the long-term sustainability of the USAR capacity-building program, USAID/OFDA helped establish a USAR training field in Barbados and is training Caribbean USAR instructors.

Following the November 2008 collapse of a primary school in Port-au-Prince, Haiti – that resulted in the deaths of 100 people, mostly children – USAID/OFDA called in the support of the Fairfax USAR team to assist Haitian firefighters and other rescue workers. This experience gave rise to efforts to strengthen USAR capacities in Haiti. Late last month, USAID/OFDA sent an assessment team composed of USAR specialists from Fairfax and the RDAP to Haiti for 10 days to help develop a USAR program support strategy. The team met with local authorities and technical specialists and visited fire services in five cities. One immediate result of the visit is a decision by the Government of Haiti to create a working group to develop a national USAR strategy and policy directions. USAID/OFDA plans to support these efforts.

"Our goal is not just to provide courses," said USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan, also the chairman of INSARAG Americas. "It is to build countries' capacities to respond, and to provide integral support based on our long-term vision and accumulated experience in the region."

Program Strengthens RC Societies

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Red Cross intervention teams and trained community members assisted with early damage assessments and relief distributions in the Guyana floods of December 2008. In Saint Lucia, individuals that participated in the Red Cross program acted quickly to share AH1N1 prevention information directly with communities as the virus began to spread regionally and globally," said program spokesman Nathan Cooper.

The \$2.7 million phase two of the program will be launched on October 9 and is expected to last two years, focusing on Haiti, St. Lucia, Antigua and Barbuda, St. Kitts and Nevis, and the Bahamas.



Photo courtesy of the Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross Society

Red Cross volunteers distribute mosquito nets in Trinidad.

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