



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

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION



Photo by Dalia Castañeda, USAID/OFDA

Beneficiaries of a USAID/OFDA-supported shelter in San Lucas de Toliman, Guatemala, express satisfaction during the inauguration of shelters constructed for families affected by Tropical Storm Agatha and ongoing rains that caused floods and landslides in late 2010.

Preparing for Hurricane Season

USAID/OFDA is preparing for an above-average hurricane season.

The Colorado State University forecast team has predicted that 16 named storms will form in the Atlantic basin during the 2011 season (from June 1 to November 30), with 9 expected to become hurricanes and 5 developing into major hurricanes (Category 3 or higher on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale). This forecast is significantly higher than the season average, which includes 10 named storms, 6 hurricanes, and 2 major hurricanes.

USAID/OFDA is ready to respond to the 2011 hurricane season with an experienced team of disaster management professionals strategically located throughout Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), emergency relief supplies and communications gear prepared for deployment, and agreements in place with partners and service providers.

A senior regional advisor and four regional advisors – experienced, multilingual disaster management professionals with broad knowledge

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Boxes of plastic sheeting donated by USAID/OFDA are unloaded in Guatemala to help build shelters for families affected by storms in 2010.



Photo by Dalia Castañeda, USAID/OFDA

DISASTER RESPONSE

USAID/OFDA Supports Course On Collapsed Structures Rescue

In late March, USAID/OFDA supported a collapsed structures search and rescue course in Panama for 28 participants from first response organizations in Central America and the Dominican Republic.

The course was a collaboration between the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), the Center for the Coordination of Natural Disasters Prevention in Central America (CEPRENAC), and USAID/OFDA.

During the weeklong training, held in Panama City from March 22 to 29, representatives from national Red Cross chapters, Civil Protection, and police and firefighter organizations in the region learned techniques and skills necessary to search, locate, access, stabilize, and extract victims trapped in collapsed structures, using the most appropriate and safest procedures for both rescue personnel and victims.



Photo by Manuel Santana, USAID/OFDA

Participants in the recent USAID/OFDA-supported course on collapsed structures rescue.

FAREWELL

USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor Retires after 23 Years of Service

Rene Carrillo, USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor for the LAC region, retired last month after 23 years of service.

During his more than two decades with USAID/OFDA, Rene contributed to multiple disaster responses, including the response to the massive earthquake in Haiti in 2010, widespread flooding in Mexico in 2008, Hurricane Felix in Nicaragua in 2007, Tropical Storm Jeanne and Hurricane Ivan in Jamaica and Haiti in 2004, earthquakes in El Salvador in 2001, forest fires in Mexico in 1998,

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FAREWELL

USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor Retires

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Hurricane Mitch in Central America in 1998, Cyclone Nadia in Mozambique in 1994, civil strife in the former Yugoslav Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1993, and the earthquake in Costa Rica in 1991, among others.

"Rene's collegiality, reliability, and technical expertise have been stellar and I am gratified to have the opportunity to acknowledge our appreciation for this as we wish him all the best in his future endeavors. Rene's hard work and dedication have created quite a legacy – one that is a testament to the power of one individual to positively impact thousands of lives," said USAID/OFDA Director Mark Bartolini.

Rene began his USAID/OFDA career in Lima, Peru, serving as a Regional Advisor in charge of the LAC Technical Assistance and Training Program in the early 1980s. For more than 15 years, based out of San Jose, Costa Rica, Rene used his extensive experience as a trainer, facilitator, and trainer of trainers to guide the growth of the USAID/OFDA regional training program, now known as the Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP). Under his leadership, the program grew from a handful of trainers to include thousands of USAID/OFDA-trained instructors in 30 countries and a portfolio of 17 courses provided in English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese. The program has substantially improved disaster response and prevention capabilities in the region.

Rene also lent his expertise to help organize and conduct workshops for the design and development of risk management training courses in other parts of the world, including Africa and Europe.

For the past several years, Rene has focused on building urban search and rescue (USAR) capacities in the region using International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) guidelines. He also served as a special advisor on USAR to the Chairman of the INSARAG Regional Group for the Americas, USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan, helping to organize and representing the Chairman at regional and global INSARAG meetings and training exercises.

"I am honored and proud to have worked with Rene, a professional who for 23 years dedicated himself to the people of this region. He worked hard to ensure that they were as prepared as possible for disasters. His work in disaster preparedness in the LAC region has left footprints that will remain for years to come," Callaghan said.

COMING UP

RDAP Annual Planning Meeting

USAID/OFDA staff and RDAP managers and disaster risk management specialists from throughout the LAC region will participate in the RDAP annual planning meeting in Miami, Florida, from May 23 to 27. Participants will review program activities executed during the past year, plan activities for the upcoming year, and receive training in response and DRR.

Joint Humanitarian Assistance Courses

USAID/OFDA has organized several upcoming Joint Humanitarian Assistance Courses (JHOCs) to inform U.S. military personnel on ways to better collaborate with USAID and the U.S. Government interagency during joint disaster response operations. USAID/OFDA JHOCs have been scheduled at Joint Task Force - Bravo in Honduras, from June 13 to 14; SOUTHCOM in Miami, Florida, from July 12 to 15; and U.S. Army South, in San Antonio, Texas, also from July 12 to 15.



Photo courtesy of the U.S. Embassy in Bridgetown, Barbados

U.S. Government representatives donate USAID/OFDA-funded chainsaws to the Barbados Department of Emergency Management to help clear debris following Hurricane Thomas in late 2010.

Hurricane Season Preparedness

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of the region's potential hazards, geography, and cultural and socio-economic characteristics – are based at the USAID/OFDA/LAC regional office in San José, Costa Rica.

The regional advisors, along with a humanitarian assistance advisor to the military, 20 disaster risk management specialists, and 307 on-call surge capacity consultants, are available for immediate deployment in case of a disaster. The specialists and surge capacity consultants are the backbone of the USAID/OFDA-supported RDAP, which provides training and technical assistance in disaster risk reduction (DRR) and preparedness to national disaster organizations and first responders in the region.

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

USAID/OFDA continually replenishes stockpiled emergency relief supplies – including plastic sheeting for temporary shelters, water containers, water treatment units, 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. USAID/OFDA also purchases supplies locally when 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.

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

"Regardless of the forecast, we must do everything in our power to prepare for floods, storms, and hurricanes. We have plans in place that look at all available options to be able to respond quickly and efficiently in the event of a disaster," said USAID/OFDA/LAC Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan.

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