



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

### DISASTER PREPAREDNESS



Photo courtesy of NOAA/NASA

*In late October 2012, Hurricane Sandy – the largest Atlantic hurricane on record – tracked westward across the Caribbean. The so-called “perfect storm” caused at least 286 fatalities and an estimated \$68 billion in damages in seven countries.*

## USAID/OFDA Engages in Robust Hurricane Season Preparedness

USAID/OFDA is working hard to ensure all facets of its response mechanism are in top shape for the upcoming Atlantic Basin hurricane season, which occurs annually between June 1 and November 30.

The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has forecast a near-normal or below-normal 2014 Atlantic Basin hurricane season due to the anticipated development of El Niño. On May 22, NOAA predicted that eight to 13 named storms will form in the Atlantic Basin during the 2014 season, of which three to six could become hurricanes, including one to two major hurricanes of Category Three or higher on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale. Based on the 1981–2010 period, an average season has 12 named storms, including six hurricanes—three of which are major.

“Even though the hurricane season forecast indicates a less active season, we know from experience that it takes only one significant storm to generate a big impact. The USAID/OFDA regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) remains as

committed as ever and is working with regional governments, partners, and emergency response organizations to be as prepared as possible and to respond immediately to any need that arises,” said USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor (SRA) Tim Callaghan.

SRA Callaghan and a team of four regional advisors—experienced, multilingual disaster management specialists with broad knowledge of the region’s potential hazards, geography, history, and cultural and socio-economic characteristics—are based at the USAID/OFDA regional office in San José, Costa Rica.

The advisors, along with two information officers, a communications officer, and 20 disaster risk management specialists (DRMSs), are available for immediate deployment in the case of a disaster. In addition, USAID/OFDA maintains a region-wide network of approximately 366 on-call local surge capacity consultants available for rapid activation to augment USAID/OFDA’s assessment and response capabilities. The DRMSs and local surge capacity consultants are

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### DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

#### USAID/OFDA Holds First Incident Command System Virtual Forum

On April 24, a team of USAID/OFDA RDAP DRMSs and thematic experts held the first USAID/OFDA Incident Command System (ICS) Virtual Forum to address lessons learned during the implementation of the system in five pilot countries in the LAC region: Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, and Mexico.

ICS was first incorporated as an integral component of USAID/OFDA’s disaster response management methodology in 1989. Recognizing that an effective ICS system is too comprehensive to deliver in a single course, USAID/OFDA developed its ICS as a multi-faceted disaster response process that includes the participation and cooperation of local and national governments, institutional authorities, and a full gamut of emergency response organizations involved in disaster response and risk management.

The USAID/OFDA regional team worked with governments of the pilot countries to develop the system, which includes an implementation process that defines the roles and responsibilities of each organization engaged in disaster response, helping to

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### DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

#### USAID/OFDA Call for Proposals To Improve Jamaica Seed Storage

USAID/OFDA has published an annual program statement (APS) seeking proposals focused on reducing post-harvest losses through developing improved household seed storage models for vulnerable populations in Jamaica.

Post-harvest seed losses can adversely affect farmer’s food and financial security. To reduce these losses, smallholder farmers can improve their seed storage techniques and practice improved post-harvest handling to reduce contamination and spoilage. The USAID/OFDA APS aims to support these activities in Jamaica as part of its regional disaster risk reduction strategy.

The deadline for submitting funding proposals under this APS is June 6, 2014. For complete information, please search for funding opportunity #APS-OFDA-14-000007 on [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov).



Photo by Alfredo Chan, USAID/OFDA

**Acapulco residents assess the damage after Category 1 Hurricane Manuel unloaded torrential rains over Guerrero State, Mexico, in September 2013. USAID/OFDA activated a three-person assessment team and provided \$250,000 to the Mexican Red Cross for the local purchase and distribution of relief supplies.**

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the backbone of USAID/OFDA's Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP), which provides training and technical assistance in DRR and response preparedness to national disaster organizations and first responders in the LAC region.

The USAID/OFDA field office in Haiti, which has a senior program officer, a program officer, and administrative support staff, remains ready to respond to adverse events in that country—including hurricanes and other tropical storms—as appropriate. USAID/OFDA also maintains a team of humanitarian assistance advisors to the military at the U.S. Southern Command in Miami, Florida, who help coordinate USAID and U.S. Department of Defense emergency humanitarian assistance in the LAC region.

In the event of a pending hurricane, USAID/OFDA may pre-deploy staff in consultation with U.S. embassies and USAID missions in potentially affected countries. The LAC regional office also assigns staff to Bridgetown, Barbados, on a rotating schedule from June to October to provide USAID/OFDA preparedness and response coverage for the Eastern Caribbean during hurricane season.

USAID/OFDA continually replenishes stockpiled emergency relief supplies—including plastic sheeting for temporary shelters, water treatment units, water containers, 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 supports the International Organization for Migration to maintain stockpiles of pre-positioned supplies in Haiti and is working to build multi-sectorial rapid response capacity. When available, USAID/OFDA may purchase emergency supplies from local sources.

USAID/OFDA currently maintains 16 open aircraft charter purchase order agreements in 10 countries in Central America and the Caribbean to ensure timely transportation of staff and supplies to disaster-affected areas. If commercial service is not available, USAID/OFDA may request assistance from the U.S. military.

In advance of hurricane season, as in years past, the LAC regional office briefs mission disaster relief officers (MDROs) and emergency action committees at U.S. embassies and the USAID missions throughout the region, in addition to meeting with key partners and other donors to coordinate preparedness activities.

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develop procedure and protocol manuals tailored to each government or institution's specific needs, and providing technical assistance to facilitate inter- and intra-institutional coordination and cooperation.

For the recent USAID/OFDA-supported forum, approximately 850 people registered as virtual participants and more than 2,600 people from 18 countries in the LAC region and the United States connected to the one-day forum online. Participants and audience members included representatives from 194 non-governmental organizations; 87 government agencies—including firefighter corps, civil defense and armed forces, and national emergency management organizations; 59 private enterprises; and 19 universities. The participants engaged in dialogue with the 13-person forum team leading the broadcast and participated in question-and-answer sessions through the forum's interactive Facebook page.

One important highlight of the virtual forum included the development of a process to guarantee integration of ICS into the legal framework of municipal and national governments and ensure the standardization of training and certification materials and processes—not only to reflect international standards of quality, coordination, and execution, but also to address the needs and particularities of each government and country.

## IN MEMORIAM

### A Tribute to Paul C. Bell, Jr.

On May 15, staff from the USAID/OFDA regional office for LAC took time to honor the memory and contributions of late SRA Paul C. Bell, Jr., an expert in risk management who dedicated his life to humanitarian work in the LAC region and helped establish the USAID/OFDA regional office in San José, Costa Rica, in the mid-1980s. Mr. Bell was the LAC team's SRA for 20 years until he passed away in May 2003.



USAID/OFDA archive photo

**Paul C. Bell, Jr. (far right), founder of the LAC training and technical assistance program, visits with recipients of USAID/OFDA humanitarian aid in the 1980s.**