

OFFICE OF U.S. FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE (USAID/OFDA)

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, SAN JOSÉ, COSTA RICA

USAID/OFDA Supports Communities in Guatemala, Following Fuego Volcano Eruption

On June 3, Fuego Volcano—located about 25 miles southwest of Guatemala City—emitted a deadly eruption of rock, gas, and ash that rose up to six miles above sea level. Fast-moving volcanic material traveled approximately six miles from the crater, causing loss of life and significant infrastructure damage in nearby rural communities. Damage included the near-total destruction of Escuintla Department’s El Rodeo and Los Lotes villages. As of June 26, the Government of Guatemala (GoG) National Coordinator for Disaster Reduction (CONRED) had confirmed at least 112 deaths, while nearly 200 people were believed to be buried under the rubble on the lower slopes of the volcano. The eruption also caused nearly 60 injuries and had displaced more than 3,500 people to 17 official shelters in Escuintla and Sacatepéquez departments as of June 26. In total, the eruption affected approximately 1.7 million people, according to the GoG.

Following the eruption, the GoG issued an emergency declaration and evacuated populations from Chimaltenango, Escuintla, and Sacatepéquez departments. In addition, the GoG mobilized 600 search-and-rescue and 300 military personnel to assist with rescue operations in hard-hit areas; however, efforts were hampered by the heat permeating from the ash and the significant ongoing risk of lahars—volcanic mudflows—due to seasonal rains. As of June 26, lahars remained the most likely hazard, posing a significant threat to communities living near water pathways.

On June 6, following an official request from the GoG for international assistance, U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala Luis E. Arreaga issued a disaster declaration due to humanitarian needs resulting from the volcanic activity. In response, USAID/OFDA provided \$600,000 to non-governmental organization Project Concern International (PCI) to support the immediate needs of households displaced by Fuego Volcano, as well as to prepare for medium- and long-term shelter and livelihoods



Following the eruption of Guatemala’s Fuego Volcano, U.S. Embassy Chargé d’Affaires David Hodge met with CONRED representatives and rescue workers in the disaster area and reaffirmed the USG commitment to support recovery efforts. *Photo courtesy of the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala*

solutions through existing public and private sector partners. In addition, USAID/OFDA, through the Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP), provided \$10,000 for the procurement of 300 water filters to facilitate access to clean drinking water for families in emergency shelters.

USAID/OFDA activated a team of disaster experts, including a regional advisor (RA), a disaster risk management specialist (DRMS), and five Guatemala-based surge capacity consultants to assess the situation, liaise with GoG response authorities, and coordinate USG response efforts. In addition, upon a request from the GoG for technical assistance, a team of scientists from the USAID/OFDA-funded Volcano Disaster Assistance Program (VDAP) began assisting Guatemala’s National Institute for Seismology, Volcanology, Meteorology, and Hydrology (INSUVIMEH) to assess the extent of damage at different locations around the volcano and analyze potential hazards. VDAP also deployed a seismologist on June 13 to support CONRED and INSIVUMEH in the implementation of a protocol to forecast and alert populations in the event of lahars. VDAP also supported INSUVIMEH by providing replacement parts for the broadband seismic station located on the southwest flank of Fuego Volcano, following damage by the eruptions. The equipment enabled INSUVIMEH to quickly restore access to seismic data and provided VDAP and INSUVIMEH scientists with high-quality seismic records to bolster data analysis.



As part of the relief efforts coordinated between USG and GoG, on June 6, a DoD C-17 flight transported six critically burned patients from Guatemala City to Galveston, Texas, where they were transported to Galveston Shriners Hospital to receive specialized medical treatment. *Photo courtesy of the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala*

On June 6, a U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) C-17 flight transported six critically burned patients and their parents from Guatemala City La Aurora International Airport to Galveston, Texas International Airport,

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where the patients received onward transport to Galveston Shriners Hospital to receive medical treatment from some of the leading global specialists in pediatric burns. This flight was part of the USG-GoG joint efforts to respond to the eruption of Fuego Volcano.

USAID/OFDA RA Phil Gelman, who deployed to Guatemala shortly after the first eruption, commented, “The outpouring of support from local sources, both the public-at-large and the private sector, has been impressive. These resources, together with those provided by governmental agencies, have largely enabled the immediate needs of the displaced people to be met.”



USAID/OFDA RA Phil Gelman meets with CONRED staff to discuss shelter solutions for families displaced by Fuego Volcano eruptions. *Photo courtesy of PCI*

(Upper) Through RDAP, USAID/OFDA provided 300 water filters to facilitate access to clean drinkable water for families displaced by Fuego Volcano. *Photo courtesy of the U.S. Embassy in Guatemala*

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In response to the earthquake swarm that struck western El Salvador in early May, USAID/OFDA provided funds to support the local purchase of shelter materials and construction tools for nearly 100 affected households. *Photo by Sergio D. Gutierrez, USAID/OFDA*

USAID/OFDA Provides Shelter Assistance to Families Affected by El Salvador Earthquake Swarm

From May 5 to 8, a swarm of more than 500 earthquakes—with at least nine measuring magnitude 4.3 or higher—struck western El Salvador, causing rock slides that blocked several roads, destroyed 11 houses, damaged nearly 290 homes, and affected hundreds of families in La Unión Department, according to the Government of El Salvador (GoES) National Commission for Civil Protection. The GoES issued an orange alert—the second highest on a three-tiered alert system, indicating medium risk—for the municipalities of Chirilagua, El Carmen, and Intipucá. The GoES also activated 26 emergency shelters, assisting more than 2,300 people during the peak of the response.

Following the earthquake swarm, USAID/OFDA El Salvador-based DRMS Sergio David Gutierrez and two local surge capacity consultants visited the affected areas to conduct a damage assessment, identify priority needs of displaced households, and liaise with local authorities.

USAID/OFDA, through the RDAP, provided \$10,000 to El Carmen Municipal Commission of Civil Protection for the local purchase of durable shelter materials and essential construction tools—including wood, galvanized sheeting, nails, hammers, and saws—to help nearly 100 affected households repair the roofs of their homes, which were severely damaged by the earthquakes.



The USAID/OFDA El Salvador-based DRMS visits communities affected by the earthquake swarm to assess damage and identify priority needs. *Photo by Francisco Linares, USAID/OFDA*