



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

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS



Photo by Ana Silvia Fernandez, USAID/OFDA

Teams of firefighters compete during the recent USAID/OFDA-supported regional forest firefighter brigade mobilization exercise.

Costa Rica Hosts Regional Firefighter Exercise

USAID/OFDA works hand-in-hand with Latin American countries to develop wildfire management policies, strategies, and plans, while helping improve technical capabilities and secure better firefighting equipment.

As part of these efforts, firefighters from the region gathered for the first time last month to exchange experiences and lessons learned in fire management. The firefighters also had the chance to show off their skills and capabilities in the First Central American Forest Firefighter Brigade Mobilization Exercise, sponsored by USAID/OFDA and hosted by the Government of Costa Rica.

More than 250 individuals, in-

cluding 19 firefighter brigades from Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama, along with delegates from Chile, participated in the event, which was held in Costa Rica from December 15 to 18, 2013.

The exercise included discussions of fire management programs and techniques, and pitted brigades against each other in friendly competitions to clear fire lines, chop wood, climb ropes, race through obstacles, extend fire hoses, and more.

Firefighters set up camp in the lush green hillsides of Agua Caliente de Cartago and cooked and shared

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Firefighters from throughout the region attended the First Central American Forest Firefighter Brigade Mobilization Exercise.



Photo by Krystal Hartman, USAID/OFDA

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

USAID/OFDA Supports Disaster Management Technical Exchange

With USAID/OFDA support, 15 professors and administrators from the Central American Council of Universities (CSUCA) participated in a disaster management technical exchange organized by the Stephenson Disaster Management Institute at Louisiana State University (LSU).

During the exchange, held from December 9 to 13, 2013, LSU introduced visitors to federal, state, and local programs to prevent, prepare for, and respond to disasters—particularly hurricanes and floods—in the U.S. state of Louisiana.

"It was an opportunity for Latin American universities to learn from Louisiana entities impacted by Hurricane Katrina, and will help incorporate disaster management into different disciplines, as well as foster resilient universities," said USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor Sidney Velado, who participated in the exchange.



Photo courtesy of CSUCA

Participants visit the East Baton Rouge Parish Mayor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

USAID/OFDA Signs Agreement with Peruvian DRR Authorities

USAID/OFDA and USAID/Peru signed a memorandum of understanding with Peru's National Center for Disaster Assessment, Prevention, and Risk Reduction (CENEPRED) on December 6, 2013.

In the document, the parties agree to collaborate on activities to develop disaster risk scenarios, disaster risk reduction (DRR) plans, community education campaigns, technical tools for risk management, and university DRR programs.

USAID also pledges to support the institutionalization and sustainability of national capacities for disaster risk management in Peru and promote private sector and civil society participation in these efforts.

DISASTER RESPONSE

USAID/OFDA Helps Families Affected by Severe Weather in the Caribbean

On December 24 and 25, torrential rains and high winds in the eastern Caribbean caused widespread flooding and landslides in Dominica, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The severe weather resulted in 15 deaths and damaged or destroyed numerous roads, bridges, houses, medical centers, and public water systems.

In response to identified needs, USAID/OFDA provided \$50,000 to the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines Red Cross to procure and distribute emergency relief commodities to affected families. The funds are also being used for projects such as debris clearing to help affected families in the hardest-hit areas rebuild and recover.

In Saint Lucia, USAID/OFDA activated a local surge capacity consultant to liaise with emergency authorities and evaluate potential humanitarian needs. Through its Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP), USAID/OFDA also provided \$5,000 to the Saint Lucia Red Cross (SLRC) to support the transportation of emergency relief items to affected communities in the Vieux Fort area. The USAID/OFDA consultant helped SLRC workers distribute relief supplies to affected residents.

Additionally, a rainwater harvesting and storage project in southern Saint Lucia, funded by an RDAP small grant in early 2013, proved to be a valuable asset during the December emergency. The back-up system, managed by the Laborie Disaster Preparedness Committee, successfully provided safe drinking water to area residents for two days after the storm, until authorities restored regular water service.



Photo by Krystal Hartman, USAID/OFDA

Firefighters at the recent mobilization exercise demonstrate new technology for extinguishing forest fires.

Costa Rica Hosts Regional Exercise

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meals during the event, which provided an opportunity for firefighters from different countries to share stories and create lasting ties.

"If any country in Central America faces extensive wildfires, firefighters from this region will likely be the first to respond," said USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan. "This exercise gave them a chance to work together before disaster strikes."

USAID/OFDA contributed \$77,000 to support the exercise. The opening ceremony was attended by senior officials from the Costa Rican government, U.S. Chargé d'Affaires a.i. Gonzalo Gallegos, and technical advisor Chris Knobel, from the U.S. Forest Service's Disaster Assistance Support Program (DASP). DASP provides technical operations management support to USAID/OFDA to plan for, respond to, and prevent disasters.

"Although it was a competition, I observed strong bonds being forged between the brigades and encouragement from all participants. The firefighters were a mix of volunteer and professional and all displayed expertise in their field," said Knobel, who presented on the U.S. incident command system (ICS) and had the opportunity to learn more about ICS implementation in various Latin American countries during his visit. The ICS is a predefined chain of command for response personnel—first employed in the 1970s in the U.S. state of California in response to forest fires—designed to help responders collaborate more effectively during emergencies.

"All the elements of ICS were being used... it was very impressive to see the application of an ICS organizational structure during the firefighter mobilization exercise," Knobel commented.

For the past 15 years, USAID/OFDA, through the RDAP, has provided fire management training and technical assistance to establish or strengthen national fire management programs, policies, and plans in countries throughout Latin America. RDAP training courses include community-level, basic, and advanced firefighting, effective use of water to extinguish forest fires, and basic to advanced ICS training.

Programs and training events are adapted to the disaster management context, needs, and capacity of each country.

REGIONAL STAFF NEWS

USAID/OFDA Welcomes New Haiti Team Members

USAID/OFDA welcomes three new regional team members to the Haiti Program Office in Port-au-Prince.

New Senior Program Officer Jonathon Anderson arrived in Haiti in late January. He previously served as a USAID/OFDA Program Officer in Ethiopia, providing oversight for emergency response, recovery, and DRR programs.

Program Officer Angelica Fleischer began her Haiti assignment in November 2013, after more than nine years of disaster management experience with non-governmental organizations in Africa and Asia.

Administrative Assistant Bathalie Guerrier, a former teacher and interpreter, joined the Haiti office in June 2013.

The team will work closely with the Government of Haiti's Directorate of Civil Protection (DPC) and partners to strengthen local disaster preparedness and response capabilities.

The USAID/OFDA regional team also wishes to thank Acting Program Officer Nina Minka for her work in Haiti during the 2013 Atlantic Basin hurricane season.



Photo by Rose Luce Cadot, USAID/OFDA

*From left:
USAID/OFDA
Program Officer
Angelica
Fleischer and
Senior Regional
Advisor Tim
Callaghan meet
with DPC Deputy
Director
Rodrigue
Crevecoeur.*

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