

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

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



After Hurricane Irma destroyed much of St. Martin Island's infrastructure, including a critical water production plant, USAID/OFDA provided water desalination services through DoD. Photo by Lionel Chamoiseau, AFP

USAID/OFDA Mobilizes to Provide Humanitarian Assistance in Hurricane-affected Caribbean Nations

Two Category 5 hurricanes—Irma and Maria—passed over the Caribbean region within a two-week period in September, resulting in loss of life and massive destruction across several island nations.

As the 2017 Hurricane Season causes unprecedented levels of devastation across the Caribbean, USAID/OFDA is utilizing its unique response mechanisms to provide immediate humanitarian assistance to affected



USAID/OFDA airlifted relief supplies for affected households in Dominica. Photo by Patrick Long, USAID/OFDA

countries throughout the region, including Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Dominica, Saint Martin, Sint Maarten, and Saint Kitts and Nevis.

As Hurricane Irma—the most powerful hurricane ever recorded in the Caribbean—approached the Lesser Antilles, USAID/OFDA began preparing for a large-scale response. This involved reviewing emergency relief stockpiles, pre-positioning staff from the regional office in Costa Rica, and activating local disaster experts throughout the region to track the storm and remain in close communication with national emergency management officials.

On September 7, after Category 5 Hurricane Irma left a trail of devastation over several Eastern Caribbean islands, USAID/OFDA activated a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART), deploying staff to hurricane-affected areas to conduct assessments, and stood up a corresponding Response Management Team in Washington, D.C., to help coordinate U.S. Government (USG)

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USAID/OFDA Responds to Mexico Earthquake

On September 19, a magnitude 7.1 earthquake struck Puebla State in central Mexico, approximately 75 miles from the capital of Mexico City. As of September 27, the Government of Mexico (GoM) reports the earthquake resulted in at least 337 deaths, injured more than 4,800 people, and damaged more than 20,000 buildings across central Mexico. The earthquake resulted in the collapse of at least 45 buildings in Mexico City alone.

Following the earthquake, the GoM issued an emergency declaration for parts of Mexico City and Guerrero, Morelos, and Puebla states and deployed first responders, including eight national urban search-and-rescue (USAR) teams and military personnel, to assist with rescue operations in affected areas.

On September 20, the GoM requested assistance from the USG, and U.S. Ambassador Roberta S. Jacobson issued a disaster declaration for Mexico due to the effects of the earthquake. In response, USAID/OFDA deployed a DART, including 67 USAR specialists and five canines from the Los Angeles County Fire Department, to support emergency response efforts in Mexico.



USAID/OFDA-funded USAR specialists from the Los Angeles County Fire Department observe a collapsed building in Mexico City. Photo Courtesy of Sara Rathbun, LA County Fire Department

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The USAR team also included two structural engineers, who conducted structural assessments—to determine whether the structures were fit for occupancy, required repair, or must be demolished—of buildings in the Mexico City area at the direction of the GoM Civil Protection.

In addition, USAID/OFDA is providing an initial \$100,000 to the Mexican Red Cross to address urgent humanitarian needs of vulnerable populations affected by the earthquake.

International USAR teams from Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Israel, Japan, Panama, and Spain also traveled to Mexico City to assist the GoM National Civil Protection System—the organization responsible for managing search-and-rescue operations. As of September 26, at least 69 people had been rescued by first responders and USAR personnel.

DART team leader Phil Gelman, who oversaw the USG’s response, commented, “We are pleased to be able to offer support to the people of Mexico during this difficult time. The capacity of the Government of Mexico to respond during the tragedy and the overwhelming generosity of the Mexican people have been quite remarkable.”



USAR canine units arrive in Mexico City by US Department of Defense transport on September 21. Photo by Adam McBride, USAID/OFDA

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response activities. In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Irma, the DART began transporting plastic sheeting, safe drinking water, and other life-saving relief supplies to affected areas in coordination with the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), humanitarian partners, and other international organizations.

Given the increasing intensity and proximity of the two recent hurricanes in the Caribbean region, the DART remained flexible to mobilize to other areas based on needs. Immediately after Hurricane Maria—a Category 5 storm—passed directly over the island of Dominica on the night of September 18, causing catastrophic damage across the island, the DART deployed members to conduct damage and needs assessments.

The DART had team members positioned in Dominica, St. Martin, Barbados, Martinique, and Guadeloupe, as of September 27, working closely with humanitarian stakeholders to meet the urgent needs of hurricane-affected populations in the region.

As of September 27, USAID/OFDA had airlifted more than 151 metric tons of critical relief supplies—including blankets, water containers, hygiene kits, and kitchen sets—from its emergency warehouse in Miami to Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Dominica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and St. Martin.

In Dominica, the DART is working with the Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica and Joint Task Force-Leeward Islands (JTF-LI)—consisting of members from DoD’s Southern Command—to ensure the rapid delivery of assistance to affected communities, especially people living in areas cut off by the storm. JTF-LI has supported the USAID-led relief efforts to hurricanes Irma and Maria since September 9.

On the island of St. Martin, the DART also provided water desalination services through DoD. Between September 15 and 26, the two water-production sites operated by DoD generated approximately 83,000 gallons of water for household use in St. Martin.

Through USAID/OFDA and the DoD, the USG has provided nearly \$10 million in humanitarian assistance for the Hurricane Irma and Maria responses as of September 27. The DART continues to prioritize the distribution of relief supplies, food assistance, shelter support, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) interventions, while simultaneously coordinating with government officials and other relief actors to determine additional humanitarian needs and develop a comprehensive response.



As of September 27, USAID/OFDA had airlifted more than 151 metric tons of relief supplies—including emergency shelter materials, hygiene kits, and water containers—for Caribbean hurricane relief efforts. Photo courtesy of Ricardo Herrera, USAID/OFDA