

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

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



Participants from the first advanced ICS course adapted specifically for the Latin America and Caribbean region replicated the training in their home countries. Photo by Luisa Alfaro, USAID/OFDA

USAID/OFDA Launches Advanced ICS Course Adapted for the Latin America and Caribbean Region

In June, USAID/OFDA's Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP) launched an advanced Incident Command System (ICS) course adapted specifically for the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region. USAID/OFDA disaster risk management specialists (DRMSs) have worked for three years to adapt the U.S.-designed course to meet the context and needs of the LAC region.

The LAC-specific advanced ICS course is a practical workshop based on the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) ICS 400 course, adjusted to take into consideration the emergency management models, protocols, and language used by national and local disaster response organizations in this region.

The ICS is used internationally by numerous organizations including governments, non-governmental organizations, and first responders

as a standardized approach to better command, control, and coordinate an emergency response. The ICS provides a specific organizational structure to the response, so that multiple groups and individuals can effectively organize themselves during a response to a disaster.

As part of the effort to release an updated advanced ICS course for the LAC region, USAID/OFDA specialists studied best practices and state-of-the-art disaster management systems. In early June, as part of this in-depth preparation, four USAID/OFDA DRMSs participated as observers of the Cascadia 2016 drill—the largest disaster preparedness exercise conducted by FEMA on the U.S. Pacific Coast—which used ICS methodology to test the capabilities of operational centers and interagency coordination systems at federal, state and local levels in response to a 9.0 magnitude earthquake scenario.

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USAID/OFDA Develops ICS Software for the LAC Region

USAID/OFDA, through RDAP, has supported the development of ICS software designed to help LAC region incident commanders manage information and resources, create incident action plans, and improve crisis communications on the ground. Prior to the software development, all ICS forms and programmatic organizational knowledge were handwritten on sheets of paper in the field. The ICS software can assist first responders in compiling data digitally, creating inventories of resources, staff, supplies, and equipment, and provides immediate access to the information for decision making during an emergency.

USAID/OFDA DRMSs traveled to Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Mexico during the past three months to demonstrate implementation of the software and provide training on how to use it in real-world settings and incorporate it into their organizations' emergency responses.

"We are very excited to be able to provide this software, free of charge, to Latin American and Caribbean first response organizations. This software represents a great leap forward for the institutions that have implemented ICS in the region so far, as it will help them become more efficient when responding to disasters," USAID/OFDA DRMS Alfaro said.

If you would like more information on receiving the ICS software for your organization, please email USAID/OFDA DRMS Pedro Soto at: psoto@ofda.gov.



USAID/OFDA DRMS Luisa Alfaro demonstrates the ICS Software. Photo by Ana Silvia Fernandez, USAID/OFDA

VDAP Celebrates 30 Years of Saving Lives

The USAID/OFDA-funded, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)-implemented Volcano Disaster Assistance Program (VDAP) is celebrating 30 years of service this month. USAID/OFDA and USGS created VDAP in response to the 1986 eruption of Colombia's Nevado del Ruiz Volcano that killed an estimated 25,000 people, with the goal of preventing future volcanic eruptions from becoming disasters.

With more than \$33 million in USAID/OFDA support, VDAP scientific teams have deployed in response to 30 major crises, assisted counterparts with hundreds of additional volcanic events, and strengthened response capacity in 12 countries since the program began. At the request of affected governments, VDAP helps fellow scientists monitor volcanic activity, assess hazards, generate eruption forecasts, and develop early warning capabilities to get people out of harm's way.

During the past 30 years, VDAP has helped save tens of thousands of lives around the world. One of VDAP's major responses in the LAC region was in 2007 and 2008, when Nevado del Huila Volcano in Colombia erupted. VDAP assisted the Government of Colombia's Geological Service by providing volcano monitoring training and developing protocols for forecasting eruptions and evacuation plans. VDAP's assistance helped Colombian officials decide to evacuate thousands of people before the volcano erupted in April 2007 and again in November 2008, inundating nearby areas with volcanic mudflows.

Following the April 2015 Cotopaxi Volcano eruption—considered one of South America's most dangerous due to its proximity to Ecuador's densely populated capital city of Quito—the Government of Ecuador asked VDAP to work with local scientists at Ecuador's Geophysical Institute (IG). VDAP provided IG with volcano monitoring equipment, data analysis, and a volcanic mudflow detection system. VDAP continues to remotely analyze eruption data and remains ready to respond should Cotopaxi's activity increase.



VDAP volcanologist Heather Wright (left) led a team of five VDAP professionals, who participated in an onsite response at Cotopaxi Volcano, Ecuador, in June and July 2015. Photo courtesy of VDAP



During the LAC-specific advanced ICS course attendees put their training into practice. Photo by Luisa Alfaro, USAID/OFDA

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Culminating years of development, the USAID/OFDA DRMSs implemented the first LAC-specific advanced ICS course in El Salvador from June 20 to 24, training two-dozen instructors from first response agencies of Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Mexico. Participants learned about managing complex incidents, how to work with emergency operations centers, and how to establish an area of command. They also learned to use ICS software, which was designed with USAID/OFDA support to provide an incident commander the necessary tools to manage resources, delegate responsibilities, create reports, and make decisions on the ground. USAID/OFDA also donated to each of the four country teams an ICS training kit containing vests, tablets, office supplies, and other important incident management items.

USAID/OFDA DRMS and ICS specialist Luisa Alfaro, who has 15 years' experience training thousands of first responders throughout the LAC region, said "in this advanced ICS course we teach participants about new emergency management models and provide the most flexible and efficient methods to oversee complex emergencies."

DRMS Alfaro added that the expansion of the advanced regional ICS course is a priority for USAID/OFDA, as this training can help response agencies better manage complex incidents and optimize resource use in response to a disaster. The instructors trained during the first course will multiply their acquired knowledge by offering the course in their home countries. In fact, just days after completion of the course, participants from El Salvador and Mexico had already conducted the advanced training in their respective countries. Additional trainings are scheduled in Colombia and Costa Rica in August.

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