

INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

VANUATU: VOLCANIC ERUPTION

18 June 2001

Information Bulletin N° 02

This Bulletin is intended for information only. The Federation is not seeking any funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

The Disaster

Since the volcano on the uninhabited island of Lopevi erupted on 8 June 2001, its activity has subsided for the moment. The heavy ash-fall has almost ceased, and the south-easterly trade winds which spread the ash have abated.

The acid ash-fall has contaminated water supplies, destroyed crops, and directly affected between 4,000-5,000 people on nearby Paama and southeast Ambrym. There have been no reports of serious respiratory problems so far according to the Health Department of Vanuatu, but there is concern over the effects of prolonged exposure to the sulphurous air and fine volcanic dust, particularly on the very young and the elderly. The Education Department has taken a precautionary measure by evacuating 175 students and teachers of the Vaum Secondary School in north-eastern Paama to neighbouring islands.

The main longer-term problems are considered to be the effects of the acid ash on food production. The Agriculture Department is in the process of preparing a report on the food needs and the Environment Department is surveying the island's water and soil conditions. The Vanuatu Government is advising the population in the affected area to keep water wells covered and dig new ones if possible. The areas on the north and south coasts of Paama are largely unaffected by the ash-fall.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

As a designated member of the Vanuatu National Executive Council on Disasters, the Vanuatu Red Cross Society (VRCS) is in close contact with the Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office (NDMO). A VRCS officer was dispatched to Paama on 10 June and is assessing the situation and conducting on-site monitoring on 10 June 2001. Three VRCS First Aiders accompanied the students and teachers of the Vaum Secondary School when they were evacuated from Paama, and also provided them with 61 blankets.

Another 450 water containers from Red Cross stock were delivered with the logistical support of an Australian navy ship to the Paama Island on 10 June 2001. The VRCS has been requested by the National Executive Council on Disasters to coordinate the shipment of water to Paama, and the arrangements for another water supply shipment within 9 days are being made. The VRCS has also provided 120 kilos of soap for the affected population in Paama.

The Federation's Regional Delegation in Suva has been kept informed by the VRCS, and is on standby to provide any technical and material assistance if required.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The VRCS, participating as a member of the Vanuatu National Executive Council on Disaster, joined an aerial assessment with the Departments of Education, Health, and Geology. The VRCS is maintaining close contact with the relevant government authorities for further coordinated assistance for the victims.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see www.ifrc.org

For further details please contact:

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All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.

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