

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

EL SALVADOR: VOLCANIC ACTIVITY

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The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 181 countries.

In Brief

This Bulletin (no. 01/2005) is being issued for information only, and reflects the status of the situation and information available at this time. The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

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The Situation

The Ilamatepec volcano, which is located near the Salvadorean cities of Santa Ana, Sonsonate, Juayua, Apaneca, and Coatepeque, has shown increased levels of activity since 27 August 2005, emitting gases and registering hundreds of small earthquakes everyday. There has also been a marked change in the coloration and water temperature of the nearby volcanic lake. Access to the volcano is only open to technical personnel and members of the civil protection that are monitoring volcanic activity. Analysis of recent data carried out by members of the Technical Coordination Committee and external advisors indicates the increased presence of magma, which is located just a few kilometres below the surface. Although experts agree that there is an increased possibility that this activity could result in a volcanic eruption, there are no clear signs to indicate that the magma is moving towards the surface. The Ilamatepec volcano last erupted in 1904.

According to the Territorial Studies Service (SNET) of the Ministry of the Environment, the volcano first began emitting a high quantity of gases and showing unusual seismic activity in July, but the increased activity in the last two weeks prompted SNET to declare a phase one yellow alert. The Salvadorean government has announced that it will begin carrying out evacuation simulations for the population living near the volcano in anticipation of an eruption. Experts from El Salvador, Costa Rica, Mexico and the United States are monitoring all developments in

the volcano. The Ministry of Health is also carrying out campaigns to ensure that the gases being emitted by the volcano do not affect the health of the local population.

According to the National Emergency Operation Centre (COEN), several shelters have been opened in the area to attend to families that may need to be evacuated: 12 shelters will be located in Sonsonate, 3 will be located in Santa Ana, one will be located in Coatepeque and one will be located in El Congo. Local authorities in the area will be in charge of managing the shelters.

Despite the ominous signals coming from the volcano, the minister of the environment has urged the population to remain calm. The population is being kept informed of all developments via the National Radio, which will give instruction in the event of an evacuation.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The departmental branches of the Salvadorean Red Cross Society (SRCS) in Santa Ana and Sonsonate are maintaining coordination with the local municipal and departmental emergency committees. The SRCS is also participating in the simulations being carried out in high risk communities.

The Red Cross VHF radio communication network is being analyzed with a view to installing an additional repeater in the area in case the current repeater, which is located in Cerro Cachío, very close to the volcano, should be damaged. The HF radio network is also being reinforced with the installation of equipment in various parts of the western region of the country in order to guarantee permanent communication with the emergency operations centre in the National Society headquarters.

National Intervention Teams (NITs) and Regional Intervention Teams (RITs) are providing assistance to the directors and volunteer coordinators in the eight branches of the SRCS that are in the first line of response. The National Society headquarters will also send vehicles and fuel to the departmental branches to support the mobilization of volunteers in case an evacuation is necessary.

Communities where early alert systems have been installed by the SRCS are being monitored to assess the effectiveness of those systems. In addition, the community first response brigades from the nearby communities of Juayua and Nahuizalco have been placed on alert and are carrying out risk mitigation campaigns, including the distribution of informational brochures in educational centres and public areas.

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