

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

MONTSERRAT: 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 185 countries.

In Brief

This Bulletin is being issued for information only, and reflects the situation and the information available at this time. The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

The International Federation undertakes activities that are aligned with its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to achieve the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:

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All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGO's\) in Disaster Relief](#) and is committed to the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For longer-term programmes in this or other countries or regions, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal. For support to or for further information concerning Federation programmes or operations in this or other countries, or for national society profiles, please also access the Federation's website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

The Situation

Hundreds of people living at the base of Montserrat's Soufriere hills volcano were evacuated as a lava dome grew to dangerous levels in this British overseas territory. Scientists say that the dome could crumble and send blistering gas and volcanic debris down the slopes of the volcano, potentially destroying homes in the low-lying Belham Valley. The volcanic dome had been building rapidly and has topped the highest part of the 914-metre-high volcano, which coughs up ash and bursts its lava cap every few months.

Scientists at the Montserrat Volcano Observatory said pyroclastic flows have already been observed but that they are at a safe distance. However, the observatory warned that these flows could escalate significantly. The volcano's latest burst of activity began on 24 December 2006. Glowing streaks of red lava have created night time spectacles visible across much of the island. The volcano's rising dome remained in place after the explosion on 8 January, raising fears of a bigger event soon.

The Soufriere Hills volcano became active in 1995, and more than half the territory's 12,000 inhabitants at the time moved away. An eruption in 1997 buried much of the south, including the capital of Plymouth, and killed 19 people. Southern Montserrat is now an "exclusion zone," and the island's 5,200 remaining residents have established their homes in the north.

Ash levels are rising to approximately 15,000 feet but East and North East winds are carrying it away from the island. Lava flows are extending to 1.5 kilometres in some areas. Preliminary observations of the dome suggest that very little material has been removed, although the area around the top of Tyres Ghaut appears to have been eaten back to form a chute, possibly making it easier for large volumes of dome material to flow into Tyres Ghaut (and Belham Valley) during future events.

On 8 January there was very little pyroclastic activity until late afternoon when little lava was observed in Tyres Ghaut. On 9 January about 4 pyroclastic flows were observed in Tyres Ghaut running distances up to and possibly exceeding 1.5 kilometres.

Low level gas and ash coming from a vent on the western side of the dome is ongoing. Seismic activity remains relatively low, and is dominated by rock fall signals and long period earth tremors, resulting from either surface or shallow (1-2 kilometres) activity. The ash-fall is not affecting any other of the other nearby Caribbean islands, so far, as winds are pushing it in an easterly direction towards the Atlantic. Local experts at the Volcano Observatory have stated that a major eruption is not predicted at this stage.

On 10 January activity remained low, with very limited pyroclastic activity: just one recorded flow in Tyres Ghaut. Low level gas and ash is still venting from the western side of the dome.

The Governor General has officially declared that all persons must leave the extended emergency area. Approximately 50 persons are therefore being evacuated from the extended danger area to Government shelters. In the worst case scenario mass evacuations would be conducted to the near-by island of Antigua & Barbuda.



Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The Montserrat Overseas Branch of the British Red Cross is in constant communication and coordination with the Montserrat Governor General's Office and the Department for International Development of the British Government, as well as with the British Red Cross and the Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU) thereby ensuring on-going communication to coordinate actions and exchange information. The Antigua and Barbuda Red Cross Society has been alerted and liaising with local authorities in the event of mass evacuations.

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