

Nicaragua: Cerro Negro Volcanic Eruption

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The Disaster

At approximately 10.00 am local time yesterday, the Cerro Negro Volcano, in the Department of Leon, erupted following two tremors, of a magnitude of 4.0 and 4.7 on the Richter scale. A third followed the eruption. Three new craters have opened in the volcano. Cerro Negro, Nicaragua's most active volcano, caused over \$20m damage when it erupted in 1992. In 1995 over 1,000 people were evacuated after a series of tremors. Currently, pyroclast, lava and ashes have been thrown out, and a yellow alert is still in place, according to the Civil Defence and the Nicaraguan Institute of Territorial Studies (INETER).

No immediate casualties or injuries have been reported, although patients from the hospital "Escuela" in Leon have had to be evacuated and housed in tents.

An initial 44 families (249 people), living within a 12 km radius, have been evacuated to a school, to avoid problems with water contamination, gas and ashes. The communities evacuated are: El Porvenir, 59 people; La Rota, 52 people; Km 18, 78 people, Km 16, 92 people and Palo de Lapa, 20 people. A full census is being done as numbers are growing according to the latest report from the Federation HoD.

Latest information from the department of Leon's Head of Civil Defence indicates that between 1,600 to 5,000 people may be evacuated if the intensity of tremors increases.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action.

The Nicaraguan Red Cross (NRC) and the Federation have issued preliminary bulletins in the region. The Director General and Director of Relief of the NRC and the Head of the Federation Delegation attended a meeting yesterday, convened by the President of the Republic, at which discussions with the President and the Red Cross officials

The Nicaraguan Red Cross with support from the Federation Delegation has immediately responded, under contingency plans recently updated as part of the ongoing DPP initiatives following Hurricane Mitch. At the moment, 35 volunteers of the Nicaraguan Red Cross have been actively carrying out this contingency plan. The Spanish Red Cross is supplying vests and ID for the volunteers. The local branch has one base radio, one mobile and three VHF portables. The NRC Headquarters has sent two trucks, two cars, one ambulance, one water purification unit, a first aid kit, 10 tents, 200 blankets, 200 comfort kits, clothes and 10 relief delegates to support the operation.

The Nicaraguan Red Cross has accepted responsibility for assisting the 1,040 persons who have sought refuge in four shelters (Leon City (2), Malpaisillo, Los Lechecuajos). Hot food is being supplied to the first evacuees. The municipality has mobilised eight emergency committees which are participating in the Red Cross action.

The International Federation Head of Delegation in Nicaragua and the Director General of the Nicaraguan Red Cross have gone to the area to evaluate and co-ordinate the activities. In agreement with the Mayor, a plan to evacuate up to 16,000 persons has been put in place with the Red Cross support.

The Civil Defence has only 40 persons and limited resources --700 water containers, 150 mattresses, 6 Water Bladders and eight trucks.

The Health Ministry is meeting immediate needs but the Red Cross will provide bottled water, first aid materials, clothing and 2,800 food packs. Part of the Hurricane Mitch stocks are available for delivery to the evacuees if needed.

Needs

So far, the Nicaraguan Red Cross and the Federation Delegation are able to meet all the most important needs. However the following needs have been identified and will be resourced from existing NRCS/Federation and bi-lateral PNS stocks: battery chargers, repairs to hospital ambulance, water purification trailer (NRC vehicle damaged en route to site).

An appeal is not anticipated at this time.

PNS are asked to contact the Central America Desk Officer (Iain Logan 41.22.730.4535/ cell 41.79.217.3347) before initiating any response.

Conclusion

The situation is currently under control but the Federation delegation is standing by to provide support to NRC action. The Regional Delegation in Guatemala is also on standby to provide additional support through its Information and DPP departments.

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