

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

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



USAID/OFDA Program Officer Peter Schecter oversees the delivery of plastic sheeting to Dominica following Hurricane Maria in 2017. Photo by John Kim, USAID/OFDA

### USAID/OFDA Provides Plastic Sheeting Training in the Caribbean

As part of hurricane and disaster preparedness efforts in the Caribbean, USAID/OFDA is training national disaster managers in best practices for using reinforced plastic sheeting to create temporary roofs and shelters. On August 24, USAID/OFDA supported a one-day workshop for disaster managers and partners to learn how best to utilize USAID/OFDA-supplied plastic sheeting. USAID/OFDA has worked with field partners and manufacturers to develop a reinforced, ultraviolet-resistant plastic that is stronger and has a longer life expectancy than “off-the-shelf” plastic sheeting.

“USAID plastic sheeting is some of the best in the world, and when installed correctly, it can last for years,” said USAID/OFDA regional advisor (RA) John Kimbrough, who covers the Caribbean region. “We hope this training will empower disaster management representatives from the various Caribbean countries to educate people in their home countries to use the plastic sheeting effectively the next time a disaster strikes.”

During the workshop, USAID/OFDA shelter advisors demonstrated cutting techniques and proper application of the plastic as a temporary roof cover. The training was carried out in collaboration with the Barbados Department of Emergency Management (DEM) and took place at the Barbados Fire and Rescue Services Academy.

Representatives from the national disaster offices of Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines attended the event.

The training included four practical exercises for participants, including creating covered living space, the importance of proper framing to support the plastic sheeting, proper cutting and care of the plastic sheeting, and calculating overall sheeting needs. In addition, the training reviewed warehousing, logistics, and transportation of the plastic sheeting.

USAID/OFDA senior regional advisor Tim Callaghan commented, “USAID/OFDA continues to work closely with the Caribbean countries and our partners in the region to support them as they implement important disaster risk reduction work.”



U.S. Department of Defense staff based in the region assist with cutting and distributing plastic sheeting in Dominica following Hurricane Maria. Photo by Pat Long, USAID/OFDA

## USAID/OFDA Supports Common Alerting Protocol Implementation

USAID/OFDA is supporting several countries in the region to adopt the Common Alerting Protocol (CAP)—a standard international format for emergency alerting and public warning. Once implemented, CAP provides a common language that allows various agencies to coordinate public alerts to help save lives and mitigate the impact of disasters. CAP is designed to notify residents of hazards related to weather events, earthquakes, tsunami, volcanoes, public health, power outages, and many other emergencies. CAP is also designed to engage multiple communication tools, ranging from sirens to cell phones, faxes, radio, television, and various internet-based communication networks.

In 2018, USAID/OFDA, in association with the U.S. National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), is supporting CAP Jump-Start workshops in Belize, Honduras, and Peru.

On August 2, more than 60 representatives from the various agencies that make up the Peru National Early Warning Network (RNAT) met in Lima for a Jump-Start workshop to discuss the implementation of CAP in Peru. “We were very pleased with the level of engagement in Peru, as authorities were very receptive to moving CAP forward as a component of the national system,” commented USAID/OFDA RA Phil Gelman.

On August 13, the Belize Minister of National Emergency Management, Edmond Castro, was the keynote speaker at the official opening ceremony for the Belize CAP Jump-Start workshop. The Peru and Belize workshops, which ran for two days each, provided forums for different stakeholders within the countries to discuss how to implement CAP and to identify which government offices or non-governmental organizations will be responsible for issuing alerts for different hazards. The Honduras workshop is expected to take place in the coming months.

Eliot Christian, who helped author the WMO guidelines for implementing CAP-enabled emergency warning systems globally, and who presented at both the Belize and Peru workshops, said, “Once you have the message in the digital format, it’s very straightforward to go ahead and turn that into the SMS message that goes to cell phones and smart-phone apps and also web pages, radio, television, and even sirens themselves so that they can pick up the content.”

Learn about CAP



A CNE contracted helicopter delivers relief kits to indigenous communities impacted by Tropical Depression 18. Photo courtesy of CNE

## USAID/OFDA Funds Helicopter Relief Flights After Costa Rican Flooding

In late July, Tropical Depression 18 caused heavy rains, flooding, and landslides throughout eastern Costa Rica, impacting indigenous populations in remote areas of eight cantons.

The Government of Costa Rica (GoCR) National Commission for Risk Prevention and Disaster Response (CNE) managed the response and requested USAID/OFDA aerial support to transport food and emergency supplies to affected indigenous populations in Talamanca and Valle de la Estrella cantons.

Through the Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP), USAID/OFDA provided financial support for eight hours of helicopter flight time to provide food, emergency supplies, and medical care to vulnerable individuals in hard-to-reach areas. Between July 22 and 23, CNE delivered approximately 1,000 food baskets and clean-up kits to 35 affected communities. GoCR authorities also assisted more than 420 households in 16 temporary shelters in the cantons of Guatuso, Limón, Matina, Sarapiquí, Talamanca, and Turrialba.

## Why CAP Is Effective

CAP is an XML-based data format for exchanging public warnings and updates about emergencies between alerting technologies. CAP allows a warning message to be disseminated simultaneously over multiple separate warning systems and to various applications, including radio, sirens, television, and mobile phone text (SMS) messages.

As more systems are built within a country or upgraded to CAP, a single alert can trigger a wide variety of public warning systems, increasing the likelihood that intended recipients receive the alert by one or more communication pathways. CAP provides the capability to include rich content, such as photographs, maps, video, as well as the ability to geographically target alerts to a defined warning area.

Because CAP provides the capability to incorporate both text and audio, CAP alerts can better serve the needs of hearing or visually impaired persons. CAP also has the capability to issue alerts in multiple languages, which could be useful in areas with high tourism traffic.

Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance  
Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean



Tel: +(506) 2290-4133  
Email: ofdalac@ofda.gov  
Internet: www.usaid.gov