

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

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



USAID/OFDA hosted the First South American Sub-Regional Fire Management Forum in Viña del Mar city, with the participation of 45 fire management leaders and experts from South America. Photo by Marco Marin, USAID/OFDA

### USAID/OFDA Helps Strengthen Coordination Among South American Forest Fire Management Systems

An ever-increasing number of forest fires is affecting countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, endangering people's health and safety and causing the loss of housing, assets, livelihoods, and biodiversity. The complexity and magnitude of the region's forest fires in recent years have highlighted the need to strengthen the capacity of national fire management systems and establish mechanisms to request, receive, and provide interregional collaboration.



Since the 1990s, USAID/OFDA DRMS Luisa Alfaro (left) has provided fire management technical assistance to Latin American countries. Photo by Marco Marin, USAID/OFDA

To promote the exchange of integrated fire management (IFM) best practices and strengthen collaborative alliances among South American forest fire management stakeholders, USAID/OFDA partnered with Chile's Fire Corps, the Chilean National Emergency Management Office (ONEMI), and Chile's National Forestry Corporation (CONAF) to host the First South American Sub-Regional Fire Management Forum from October 16-17. A total of 45 fire management leaders and experts from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay met in Chile's Viña del Mar city to share lessons learned; participate in frank discussions on forest fire prevention, preparedness, and control; and work together on the strategic planning of a Southern Cone IFM program.

"The forum provided an opportunity to exchange knowledge and share lessons learned during recent responses to forest fires in wildland-urban interface areas—communities on the border between urban development and unoccupied rural land characterized by increased fire risk,"

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### Brazil's Civil Defense Honors USAID/OFDA's DRR Capacity Building Efforts in Brazil

Brazil's Civil Defense and Protection Secretariat (SEDEC) honored USAID/OFDA RA Sidney Velado with the Civil Defense Medal—an award given by the organization to distinguish those who have supported outstanding work in the area of disaster prevention and response—for his efforts to support disaster risk reduction (DRR) capacity-building programs to protect the lives of inhabitants of Brazil.

Antonio de Pádua de Deus Andrade, Government of Brazil (GoB) Minister of National Integration, and Renato Newton Ramlow, GoB Civil Defense and Protection Secretary, presented the award to several recipients, including RA Velado, during an annual ceremony held on December 5 in Brazil's capital city of Brasilia.

For the past 10 years, RA Velado has led USAID/OFDA's Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP), which has helped increase local and regional disaster risk management capabilities, improve intergovernmental coordination, and strengthen disaster preparedness and mitigation activities throughout the LAC region.



GoB Civil Defense and Protection Secretary Renato Newton (left) presents the award to USAID/OFDA RA Sidney Velado. Photo by Irene Gago, USAID/OFDA

## USAID/OFDA Launches Information Management and Analysis Course

In mid-December, USAID/OFDA launched and validated a five-day information management and analysis course for 18 representatives from national disaster management agencies in Mexico, including the Mexican Red Cross, Mexico Civil Protection Agency, and fire departments from Jalisco, Nayarit, and Tijuana municipalities. The course, which was held in the city of Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, provided participants with tools and techniques for organizing and summarizing data, creating in-depth needs analysis frameworks and flows, and implementing structured analytical processes that enable better decision making during a response. USAID/OFDA plans to incorporate this new course into RDAP's training portfolio for other LAC countries.

“With these new tools and techniques, disaster management agencies can more quickly and effectively set priorities, objectives, and strategies to meet the needs of populations affected by emergencies,” said USAID/OFDA Disaster Risk Management Specialist Sergio David Gutiérrez, who led the training's design and development. “Participants indicated the course would help improve the capacity of information management units at operation centers and crisis rooms during a response,” Gutiérrez added.

“Through this new course, we want to help increase response actors' capacity to organize and manage information and enhance their analytical thinking during humanitarian emergencies so they can make data-driven response decisions,” said USAID/OFDA RA Sidney Velado, who oversees the RDAP program.



The training provided participants with tools and techniques for organizing data and creating in-depth needs analysis flows. *Photo by Sergio D. Gutierrez, USAID/OFDA*

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said USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor (RA) Sidney Velado, who participated in the forum. “We are working hard to help Latin American countries adopt and implement standard fire management protocols and procedures that allow cooperation among different emergency response institutions of the region. In addition, we are promoting the development of sub-regional drills and mobilization exercises,” Velado added.

“To strengthen coordination and cooperation among countries, forest fire management systems need to develop a joint Southern Cone IFM program, with processes, protocols, and procedures that enable multiple groups and individuals to effectively work together during a response, under a common emergency management structure and language,” USAID/OFDA IFM Technical Specialist Luisa Alfaro said.

“The meeting brought together leaders from different South American forest fire management agencies, who discussed how to improve the Southern Cone's region's wildfire control and develop agreements to reinforce and expedite international support during large-scale events,” CONAF Executive Director Jose Manuel Rebolledo noted.

Forum participants along with USAID/OFDA DRMS and RDAP South Cone Sub Regional Manager Antonio Pinheiro agreed to lead efforts to develop a sub-regional IFM program and to promote greater integration among regional emergency response actors—including private-sector companies, non-governmental organizations, volunteer community groups, and governmental agencies.

“This forum helped create networking among leaders of forest fire response agencies of the Southern Cone and promoted decision-making for the establishment of common protocols and the implementation of joint fire management drills and simulation exercises,” Brazil's National Center for the Prevention and Control of Forest Fires (PREVFOGO) Coordinator Gabriel Zacharias said.



The meeting brought together leaders from different South American forest fire management agencies, who discussed how to improve the Southern Cone's region's wildfire control. *Photo by Marco Marin, USAID/OFDA*