

Disasters On-Line

BY THOMAS M. PARRIS

The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction was designed to reduce the loss of life, property damage, and social and economic disruption caused by natural disasters (<http://www.idndr.org>). Recent news highlights the importance of this work: floods in Mozambique and Madagascar; earthquakes in Turkey; wildfires in Indonesia; and drought in the United States, among other events. Access to information is critical to prepare for and respond to natural disasters.

A good place to start is ReliefWeb (<http://www.reliefweb.int>), a project of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. This site provides a comprehensive list of natural disasters from the most recent (spillage of mining waste in Romania) back to 1981 (drought and civil strife in Chad). Each listing is supported by a library that contains analysis, assessments, news, press releases, project descriptions, sectoral reports, and situation reports. The site also provides access to a large collection of general-purpose and specialized maps. Equally important is the financial tracking information that documents international assistance by event, donor, purpose, value, and distribution.

Notable among related sites are AlertNet (<http://www.alertnet.org>), the Disaster Center (<http://www.disastercenter.com/>), the Disaster News Network (<http://www.disasternews.net>), Disaster Relief (<http://www.disasterrelief.org/>), and the Emergency Information Infrastructure Partnership (<http://www.emforum.org/>). These sites provide a mix of news and photographs of recent disasters; clearing-houses for appeals by private voluntary organizations; and links to active monitoring services. ReliefWeb, AlertNet, and the Disaster News Network are international in scope, whereas the Disaster Center, Disaster Relief, and the Emer-

gency Information Infrastructure Partnership focus primarily on the United States.

Within the United States, several government agencies are actively involved in preparing for and responding to natural disasters. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (<http://www.fema.gov/>) coordinates all of these efforts. Its web site provides a wealth of information, including fact sheets describing how to prepare for a wide variety of natural disasters, descriptions and data related to the National Flood Insurance Program, and maps of current year disaster declarations. Additional governmental information can be found on the U.S. Geological Survey hazards theme page (<http://www.usgs.gov/themes/hazard.html>), the Center for the Integration of Natural Disaster Information (<http://cindi.usgs.gov/>), and the National Geophysical Data Center (<http://www.ngdc.noaa.gov/seg/hazard/>).

Academic research centers that focus on natural disaster management include the Natural Hazards Center at the University of Colorado (<http://www.colorado.edu/hazards/>) and the Disaster Research Center and the University of Delaware (<http://www.udel.edu/DRC/>). HazLit (<http://www.colorado.edu/hazards/litbase/litindex.htm>) is a useful bibliographic database of social science literature focusing on how society prepares for, responds to, recovers from, and mitigates the effects of natural disasters.

For information about additional Internet sites focused on natural disasters, consult Selected Internet Sites on Hazards and Disasters at <http://www.colorado.edu/hazards/sites/sites.html> or Disaster! Finder at <http://ltpwww.gsfc.nasa.gov/ndrd/disaster/links/>.

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