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Disaster Management Alliance Update

Friday, October 24, 2008

During the Regional Integration Conference held in San Salvador July 23-25, we heard presentations and comments from the disaster preparedness and emergency management authorities of Costa Rica , Honduras and Jamaica . This week's bulletin focuses on the presentation from Costa Rica .

It is fundamental that the private sector become familiar with the government's priorities, capacities, strategies, limitations and needs. This information helps companies to take measures to protect their own productive capacity. Additionally companies can improve conditions in surrounding communities where their employees live and where cooperation is in agreement with the corporate social responsibility strategy.

Mr. Daniel Gallardo, President of the Nacional Risk Prevention and Emergency Response Commission (NEC) of Costa Rica and Vice President of CEPREDENAC, discussed four topics:

Risk & Vulnerability

Mother Nature is handing us a bill with interest as we keep facing natural disasters of higher magnitudes. In the past, we were not facing the natural phenomenon which we are experiencing today. Each time the situation becomes more complex.. Many of these events should not surprise us. Year after year, the same rivers overflow and hurricanes hit the same parts of our coasts. Many countries are aware of the alerts that they receive before the natural disaster, yet they still do not act upon them.

Private Sector

In all three stages of any emergency the private sector must be involved. The private sector needs to take into account that not only humanitarian interests are involved during a disaster. Particular interests, as well as economic interests are also implied in these cases. How will a company be able to carry on if its employees are stuck in shelters? The business sector cannot sit back and wait for the state to resolve its problems. It is imperative that the corporate sector become involved prior to the natural disaster. Companies must work on mitigation projects that include the areas of training and preparedness. The private sector needs to take into account where infrastructure will be placed; especially in countries were it is not insured. When the

disaster takes place there needs to be a committee issued guarantee that the items needed will be provided.

National Risk Prevention and Emergency Response Commission

Disasters are handled in three different stages by the NEC: before, during, and after. The NEC in Costa Rica has not had to request international humanitarian aid in over six years. Costa Rica has been able to provide funds to deal with a natural disaster on its own. Three percent of the income or "superbario" from public institutions is placed into a disaster fund. The commission is able to survive because of the budget that has been established by the state. To become involved in a fundraising marathon during a crisis generates a second crisis in itself. Last year, Costa Rica spent eight months attending to emergencies with the support of the private sector and the government. It exemplified the fact that there needs to be a joint effort in order for the outcome to be successful. The after stage of a disaster is fundamental. NEC is the only organization in Central America that works on reconstruction and appoints other organizations as executor units. By law the NEC must work with the private sector.

Legislative Framework

Countries must count on a legal framework and organization in order to be able to create an autonomous institution. It requires integration from all parts of society including; NGO's, private sector, and the community. In the past, emergency conventions were composed solely of the military sector. Participation from the armed forces in the countries that have the possibility is vital to the logistics of the operation. However, when it comes to coordination this creates anarchy. There needs to be a board of directors to work with. During an emergency an organization should be activated that will establish the decision makers and who should be involved.

So, what do the companies think? We would like for you to share your ideas and questions with each other and with us.

The Disaster Management Alliance

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