

Environmental action in response to the Peru earthquake: an example of good practice

Event

On 15 August 2007, a major earthquake measuring 7.9 on the Richter scale struck southern Peru, with the majority of damage occurring in the department of Ica. There were more than 500 people killed and 1,300 people injured. Approximately 75,000 homes were either damaged or destroyed.

Response

Immediately, the Joint Environment Unit undertook an Environmental Risk Identification (ERI), which identifies secondary risks posed by large infrastructure and industrial establishments that could hold hazardous materials in the area affected by a natural disaster.

In the Ica Department, mining activities, hydropower dams and the metallurgic industry were identified as potential threats. This information was shared with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Regional Office in Panama and with the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team in Peru. Fortunately, no installations identified in the ERI were damaged enough by the earthquake to pose any risk to the local population or humanitarian workers.

Due to the magnitude of the emergency, the Joint Environment Unit also deployed two environmental experts as associate members of the UNDAC team. The environmental experts, originating from the Brazilian *Centro de Apoio Científico em Desastres* – UFPR, conducted a Rapid Environmental Assessment (REA) to identify any acute and life-threatening problems.

Medical waste and general waste and rubble were the two most pressing issues requiring immediate attention. The medical waste was being disposed of in an unsafe manner and the rubble was being dumped on a beach in a nature reserve in the Pisco area.

Solutions

Following discussions with national authorities, two incinerators were purchased by the government to burn the medical waste at the Pisco and Ica hospitals.

Local authorities identified a new location more suitable for the general waste and rubble.

Authorities also distributed the Emergency Waste Management guidelines, as developed by the Joint Environment Unit, to educate the public the proper handling of waste to ensure their safety and to minimize the impact on the environment.

