

COMMUNICATION IN VOLCANIC CRISES MANAGEMENT

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The worldwide average number of fatalities per year caused by different forms of volcanic activity has been larger this century than it was in past centuries, indicating that population vulnerability grows at a rate higher than the disaster-reduction capabilities. As in many other hazardous phenomena, increasing population settling in threatened areas translates into a rapidly increasing vulnerability. In the new millenium these trends must be reversed. Since disaster may occur when a social group fails to respond to a threatening situation resulting from volcanic activity or any other natural phenomenon, society and scientists -as part of society- should react to the threat and reduce the possibility of a disaster. Scientific and technical development has shown important advances in the last three decades, particularly in the subject of precursor recognition, permitting early warnings of different potentially destructive phenomena. However, experience shows that the society reaction may be heavily hampered by communication difficulties and incomprehension derived from the different perception of the phenomena, the hazard, and the risk by different sectors of the society. Authorities, geoscientists, social scientists and the general public may each have a very different perception of a given crisis situation. Measures to reduce this source of disaster should thus be implemented. The experience of the volcanic crises management at Popocatepetl volcano in Mexico, involving large sectors of society, and the methods used to reduce the communication difficulties are described from the viewpoint of a geoscientist.