

VUELCO: Volcanic Unrest in Europe and Latin America 2nd WORKSHOP

“Scientific advice, decision-making, risk communication”
7 - 8 November 2013

The great development of scientific knowledge in recent years has helped to improve the understanding of natural phenomena. It has granted a better characterization and description to the point that sometimes we can foresee their development and take action to prevent possible situations of risk.

This development has, perhaps to an exaggerated degree, increased the trust of the general public in the current capabilities of science, in view of the fact that the great number of variables involved in determining the evolution of the processes, do not yet allow complete understanding and prediction of many of them.

A prime example of this is represented by the case of the volcanic unrest.

Parallel to the development of scientific understanding, there has also been enormous growth of the availability of information, which causes an always greater need of full and immediate understanding of situations. To fulfill this need, new and suitable approaches must be developed.

As a result of a combination of these factors, the scientific community is expected to have a predictive capability that in reality it has not-yet-reached, along with complete transparency of analysis and immediacy of communication. Continuing to conduct their work in the service of society, scientists should develop even greater capacities of transmitting science knowledge and, above all, its limitation and the unavoidable uncertainties associated therewith. Both when dealing with the public in general and especially when they are called upon to express their assessments to the authorities on whose shoulders rests the responsibility of making important decisions.

Effective communication among scientists, decision-makers and the general public has attained greater significance. A better understanding of situations aids informed decision-making both at the community level as well as at the individual level.



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The interaction between scientists and decision-makers is a process that evolves over time to arrive at a point that allows those making decisions on behalf of a community to gain an adequate understanding of a particular situation.

All the while, considering the transparency for which the public rightly calls, decision-makers will be called upon to make choices upon the basis of criteria which ideally are objective, well-characterised, measurable and, as much as possible, shared.

Moreover, it is necessary that the communities exposed to risk be made full aware of the situations which they may face. It becomes more and more evident that awareness building cannot only be left for phases of crisis, but needs to evolve as part of a long-term strategy aiming at creating an informed and responsive community.

If successful, communication during crisis will likely be more effective, especially where opportunely structured and organized in advance.

All of the above communication and interaction strategies become far more difficult to implement amid increasing technical and scientific uncertainties, with more complex socio-economic fabrics and with an increasingly larger vulnerable population.

This workshop, organized by the Italian Department of Civil Protection within the context of the European Commission funded project VUELCO, represents a follow-up workshop to the workshop held in Colima (Mexico) in November 2012. The workshop will focus on the interaction and communication among scientists, decision-makers and populations, as well as on the processes of decision-making during volcanic unrest.

The goal of the workshop is to make a contribution to the subject and to offer an opportunity to consult, learn what is being done in the various countries of the world, share experiences and possibly go as far as delineating a set of possible “best-practices”.



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