

ESA satellite flood mapping service begins

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A European Space Agency-supported, satellite-based rapid mapping service began operations Wednesday to support civil defense activities in eastern France.

The 24-hour-a-day service is designed to manage flood events -- the world's most widespread category of natural disaster.

As well as being applied to risk assessment and prevention efforts, the ESA-backed Flood Plain Monitoring Service aims to deliver map products to end users within six hours during times of crisis -- giving emergency responders the ability to track the full extent of floods as they occur.

Developed over three years through the ESA's Earth Observation Market Development program, the service is based on two types of satellite data. High-resolution imagery from optical satellites is combined with satellite radar imagery that can be acquired even at night or through heavy cloud cover or rainfall.

The Paris-based ESA said one of the new service's objectives is to keep detailed satellite-derived maps of past flood events and their evolution, to build an accurate account of what has previously occurred.

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