

USGS to help Chile develop volcano early warning system

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The U.S. Geological Survey is partnering with the Chilean government to develop a volcano early warning and emergency response system for the country after the historic eruption of Chaitén Volcano on May 2.

Following the eruption, the USGS helped Chile to install monitoring networks at Chaitén to transmit data in real time and help warn the public of further eruptions. On June 13, the USGS signed a letter of intent with President Bachelet of Chile to help the nation establish a volcano early warning system.

"There was virtually no instrumental monitoring at Chaitén Volcano prior to the eruption," said USGS scientist John Ewert, who noted that 5,000 residents were evacuated from areas near the volcano. "Without the monitoring, people nearby or at risk have almost no time to prepare themselves, their families or their possessions for what may be a life-altering event."

"The Chaitén Volcano is continuing to build a lava dome at a spectacular rate, to emit fine ash, and to produce lahars — rivers of mud and debris — that continue to flow through the town of Chaitén," said USGS scientist Andy Lockhart, who was on the ground at Chaitén.

Chile's volcano early warning system will be modeled after a plan the USGS released in 2005 in the United States that systematically ranks the most dangerous volcanoes and assesses monitoring gaps at each volcano.

The United States has a total of 169 potentially active volcanoes, half of which have some monitoring, and five volcano observatories nationwide. Chile has 120 potentially active volcanoes and one volcano observatory for the nation.

The work in Chile was done with support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, and future work will be coordinated through the Volcano Disaster Assistance Program, a 22-year collaborative project between the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance and the USGS.

"Fundamentally, we build friendships with our colleagues and partners around the world and together we are better able to mitigate these potentially dangerous events," said USGS scientist John Pallister.

Source: United States Geological Survey

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