

Chile, Argentina on red alert over Copahue volcano (Update)

May 27 2013, by Luis Andres Henao



This photo released by the Government of Neuquen, Monday, May 27, 2013, shows a plume of ash and smoke rise from the Copahue volcano, as seen from Caviahue, in the Argentine province of Neuquen, Friday, May 24, 2013. Chile has issued a red alert for the Copahue volcano on the border with Argentina that has become increasingly active. The nearly 10,000-foot (2,965-meter) volcano sits in the Andes cordillera, straddling the border with Argentina's Neuquen province. (AP Photo/Government of Neuquen, Tony Huglich)

Chilean and Argentine officials issued a red alert Monday for the increasingly active Copahue volcano bordering the two countries and

ordered the evacuation of about 3,000 people.

Chilean Interior and Security Minister Andres Chadwick said the increased activity could lead to an eruption and officials would soon begin evacuating 2,240 people, or 460 families, within a 25-kilometer (15.5-mile) radius.

"This evacuation is obligatory; it's not voluntary," Chadwick told reporters.

Chile's Emergency Office said the evacuation could last about 48 hours, but could be delayed because of heavy rains.

The nearly 10,000-foot (2,965-meter) sits in the Andes cordillera, overlapping Chile's Bio Bio region and Argentina's Neuquen province.

Argentine officials raised their alert level to red Monday afternoon due to higher seismic activity and ordered the evacuation of about 600 people from the town of Caviahue to the neighboring city of Loncopue.

"The volcano is not erupting yet, but as a preventive measure we've decided to evacuate the population," the Neuquen Crisis Committee said.

"There are no ashes in Caviahue. The vapor plume has descended, but in the last days, seismic activity has increased. That's the reason behind the change of alert in Argentina and Chile."

Copahue registered high seismic activity in December when its ash cloud billowed almost a mile (1.5 kilometers) high.

The volcano had a major eruption in 1992, according to the Chilean Mining Ministry's Sernageomin geology unit. It became highly active

with blasts and gases in 2002, in its strongest activity in more than 20 years.

Chile has more than 3,000 volcanoes the Andes and about 500 of them remain active.

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Citation: Chile, Argentina on red alert over Copahue volcano (Update) (2013, May 27) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-05-chile-issues-red-copahue-volcano.html>

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