

200 missing as Guatemala volcano threatens new eruptions

June 6 2018, by Edgar Calderon, Henry Morales Arana



A smoke column billows from the lower part of the Fuego volcano near Guatemala City on June 5, 2018

Explosions boomed from Guatemala's fearsome Fuego volcano Wednesday, unleashing fresh torrents of molten mud and ash down slopes where officials said 75 people had been killed and 200 were still missing.

Fears of a fresh blowup of the 3,763-meter (12,346-foot) volcano have stalked [rescue workers](#) since Sunday's eruption buried entire villages on its southern flank.

Officials said the known number of dead was 75, though that toll was expected to rise.

"We already have data with names and locations where there are missing persons and that number is 192," Sergio Cabanas, head of Guatemala's disaster management agency, told reporters.

Among the latest of the 75 fatalities reported by the National Institute of Forensic Sciences was a 42-year-old woman who died in hospital having lost both legs and an arm in the eruption.

Experts said the [volcano](#) recorded several weak explosions on Wednesday, generating a fresh 4,700 meter (15,500 feet) high column of gray ash.

"The explosions are generating moderate avalanches that have an approximate distance of 800 to 1,000 meters and on their trajectory they are carrying fine material to a height of around 100 meters," the Volcanology Institute said.

"There is persistent ash in the environment."



Police officers carry a victim in the ash-covered village of San Miguel Los Lotes, in Escuintla Department

Emergency workers had to temporarily suspend their search late Tuesday after a new eruption triggered a landslide.

Hundreds of people were evacuated from seven communities in the Escuintla area near the summit, as panicked locals rushed to their cars to escape, causing chaotic traffic.

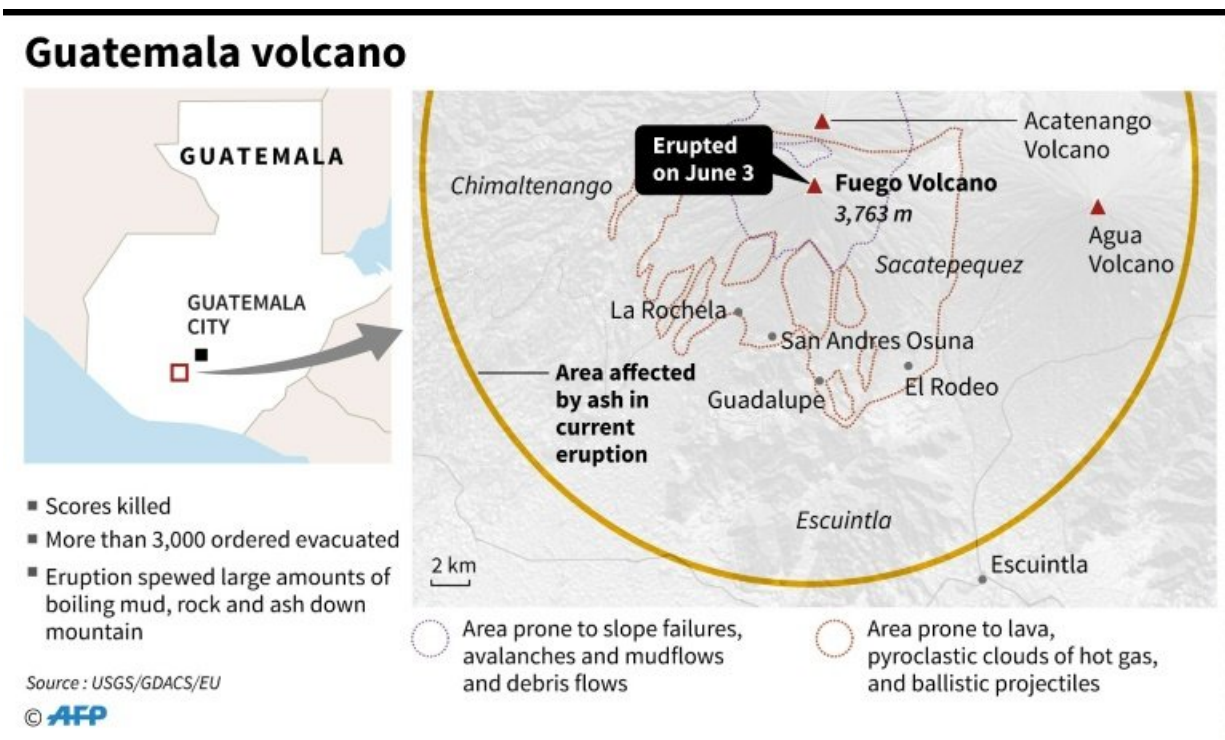
An AFP photographer saw a large plume of ash rise into the sky, prompting an evacuation of everyone authorities could find before the police, the military and rescuers were ordered to stand down.

Ongoing search

Hundreds of rescue workers, including firefighters, police and the military, were battling adverse conditions to search for remains in the tangled morass of rubble, dust and earth left behind by the landslides.

Firefighters hosed down their smoking boots, which had sunk into molten volcanic material just below the ash surface.

Everything in the search area was covered in a thick blanket of dust. In the murk created by the dust, police were using red ink to mark homes that had already been searched for bodies.



Factfile on the Guatemala volcano that has left scores dead

More than 12,000 people have been evacuated from their homes, the disaster management agency said, more than 3,000 of them housed in temporary shelters.

On the slopes Wednesday, local volunteers distributed food to rescue workers.

"We come in support of the people who are really risking their lives for the people who are there," said Gladys Vian, a 56-year-old member of the Catholic parish of Escuintla.

Strongest in decades

The killer eruption was the Central American country's strongest in four decades.

It sent huge clouds of ash barrelling over the surrounding area, blanketing roads, cars and people in thick gray dust as a river of molten mud carved a path down the mountain, sweeping away entire villages.

Officials said the speed and ferocity of the eruption took mountain communities by surprise, with many of the dead found in or around their homes.



Soldiers search for victims of the Fuego Volcano eruption in the ash-covered village of San Miguel Los Lotes

Despite offers of international help from the United States, Mexico and several Latin American neighbors, Guatemalan authorities have not made a request for foreign aid.

The foreign ministry said disaster management agency CONRED would help determine any such request.

"We are ready when CONRED as the governing body of emergency management authorize us to make an appeal," the ministry said in a statement.

President Jimmy Morales has been criticized on social media for passively waiting to react to offers of international aid.

The head of the international Red Cross Francesco Rocca is due to visit the country on Thursday, the Geneva-based agency said.

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