

Philippine volcano still 'life threatening' despite lull

January 16 2020, by Aaron Favila and Jim Gomez



A motorcycle that is covered in volcanic ash is left by its owner at a deserted village near Taal volcano in Talisay, Batangas province, southern Philippines on Friday Jan. 17, 2020. Taal volcano remains life-threatening despite weaker emissions and fewer tremors, an official said Friday and advised thousands of displaced villagers not to return to the danger zone. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)

An erupting Philippine volcano remains life threatening despite weaker emissions and fewer tremors, an official said Friday and advised thousands of displaced villagers not to return to the danger zone.

The Taal volcano emitted weaker ash and steam explosions Thursday and Friday, the sixth day of its eruption. But despite the seeming lull, continuing volcanic quakes, the drying of the crater lake and other signs indicate magma is moving beneath, said Maria Antonia Bornas, an official with the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology.

"When there is an explosion, that will be life threatening, especially if people get very near, like on Volcano Island," Renato Solidum, head of the the institute, told The Associated Press.

The volcano since Sunday has remained at alert level 4, the second-highest warning, indicating a hazardous explosive eruption is possible in hours or days. Solidum said assessing whether the volcano's restiveness has eased may take up to two weeks.

Tens of thousands of people have been evacuated from areas now under a security lockdown, and soldiers and police have been stopping desperate villagers from returning to retrieve belongings and save their poultry and cattle. Police have allowed batches of residents to check their homes for a few hours during the day in some high-risk villages.



A cloud of steam comes out of Taal Volcano as seen from Tagaytay, Cavite province, southern Philippines on Friday Jan. 17, 2020. Taal volcano remains life-threatening despite weaker emissions and fewer tremors, an official said Friday and advised thousands of displaced villagers not to return to the danger zone. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)

Jerick Oco, a 21-year-old who worked as a tourist guide on Volcano Island, which sits in the middle of Taal Lake south of Manila, was relieved to hear that the volcano was calming down but said poor villagers like him face more daunting problems, like finding new homes and jobs.

"They should help people retrieve belongings from their homes instead of blocking them. They should help them restart (their lives) again," Oco said.

Many houses and farms are damaged by ash, though no deaths or major injuries directly caused by the eruption have been reported. Authorities have reported one traffic fatality on an ash-covered road and an evacuee dying from a heart attack.

About 125,000 people fled their homes in hardest-hit Batangas province, more than 65 kilometers (40 miles) south of Manila. At least 373 evacuation sites were crammed with the displaced and needed more face masks, portable toilets, bottled water and sleeping mats, according to a provincial disaster-response office.



An injured horse that was rescued from the volcano island of Taal stays near the shore as it rests at Talisay, Batangas province, southern Philippines on Friday Jan. 17, 2020. Taal volcano remains life-threatening despite weaker emissions and fewer tremors, an official said Friday and advised thousands of displaced

villagers not to return to the danger zone. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)



Residents ride a passenger jeep as they evacuate to safer grounds at a deserted village near Taal volcano in Talisay, Batangas province, southern Philippines on Friday Jan. 17, 2020. Taal volcano remains life-threatening despite weaker emissions and fewer tremors, an official said Friday and advised thousands of displaced villagers not to return to the danger zone. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)



Rubber boots that are covered in volcanic ash is left by it's owner at a deserted village near Taal volcano in Talisay, Batangas province, southern Philippines on Friday Jan. 17, 2020. Taal volcano remains life-threatening despite weaker emissions and fewer tremors, an official said Friday and advised thousands of displaced villagers not to return to the danger zone. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)



Fishermen check their boats at the lake beside Taal volcano in Talisay, Batangas province, southern Philippines on Friday Jan. 17, 2020. Taal volcano remains life-threatening despite weaker emissions and fewer tremors, an official said Friday and advised thousands of displaced villagers not to return to the danger zone. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)



An injured horse that was rescued from the volcano island of Taal stays near the shore as it rests at Talisay, Batangas province, southern Philippines on Friday Jan. 17, 2020. Taal volcano remains life-threatening despite weaker emissions and fewer tremors, an official said Friday and advised thousands of displaced villagers not to return to the danger zone. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)



A worker cleans out volcanic ash at a restaurant near the Taal Volcano at Tagaytay, Cavite province, southern Philippines on Friday Jan. 17, 2020. Taal volcano remains life-threatening despite weaker emissions and fewer tremors, an official said Friday and advised thousands of displaced villagers not to return to the danger zone. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)



A vehicle passes by a crack on the road caused by Taal volcano's activity in Laurel, Batangas province, southern Philippines on Friday Jan. 17, 2020. Taal volcano remains life-threatening despite weaker emissions and fewer tremors, an official said Friday and advised thousands of displaced villagers not to return to the danger zone. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)



A worker wipes off volcanic ash at a restaurant near the Taal Volcano at Tagaytay, Cavite province, southern Philippines on Friday Jan. 17, 2020. Taal volcano remains life-threatening despite weaker emissions and fewer tremors, an official said Friday and advised thousands of displaced villagers not to return to the danger zone. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)

The government's main disaster agency reported a little more than 77,000 people were displaced in Batangas and the nearby provinces of Cavite and Laguna. The reason for the discrepancy was not immediately clear.

Among those displaced were about 5,000 people who live on Volcano Island. It is a popular tourist destination renowned for its stunning view of the volcano's crater lake and lush hills teeming with trees and birds.

Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana has recommended that villagers should not be allowed back.

The 1,020-foot (311-meter) Taal is the second-most restive of about two dozen volcanoes across the Philippines. The archipelago lies in the Pacific "Ring of Fire," the string of faults around the ocean basin where much of the world's seismic activity occurs.

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