EFG Pressrelease

WORKSHOP "MANAGING NATURAL HAZARDS"

Tenerife
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The Spanish Official Professional Geologists Association (ICOG) and the European Federation of Geologists (EFG) have co-organized in Puerto de la Cruz, Tenerife (Spain) the Workshop "Managing Natural Hazards". The event was attended by around 40 geoscientists from Europe (Spain, Italy, Portugal, Greece, Finland. UK, Hungary, Ireland, Sweden, The Netherlands, Serbia, Belgium, Switzerland and Germany) and the USA. The workshop aimed at promoting an interchange of ideas, practices and proposals in the field of managing natural hazards and at reviewing projects that are currently being developed with a view to contributing to decision making processes.

In the light of the event's venue, Tenerife, one of the Canary Islands with volcanic origins, the presentations given during the workshop focused mostly on the risk of volcanic eruptions but dealt with different aspects of the management of natural hazards. Interesting case studies from the geologist's point of view were presented by Dr. Robert Font (Coping with urban geological hazards in North-Central Texas, USA – A legacy of the state's geological, tectonic and volcanic history), Corrado Cencetti (Volcano-related hazards and risks in southern Italy), Luis E. Suárez (Natural risks in Spain), Nemesio Pérez (Reducing volcanic risk in the canary islands) and Éva Hartai (Red mud spill in Hungary, October 2010).

Another more practical aspect of the management of natural hazards was highlighted by Isabel Fernández and David Norbury who presented tools for geohazards prevention which are currently developed in the framework of the Terrafirma project (Terrain motion measurements – Services to society ; Selling Geohazards information to non scientists).

Finally, the workshop also gave a voice to other professions and their way of approaching natural hazards management: Anna Seres (Geographer, University of Miskolc): Snow avalanche risk model, generating daily updated, high resolution danger maps; Carlos García Royo (M.Sc. Geologist, Airline Transport Pilot. Iberia Airlines): Volcanic ash and gas as a potential hazard in air navigation; Captain Ignacio Juan Oliver Llorente (Los Rodeos Emergency Military Unit Detachment Commander): The Spanish emergency military unit (UME) in the management of natural disasters; José Julio Rodrigo Bello (GRAFCAN Head of Engineering Department): Canary islands spatial data infrastructure as tool for natural disaster prevention and analysis.

The presentations given during the workshop convinced all by their high quality and it was particularly interesting to hear about different professional approaches to geohazards management. It was outlined throughout the presentations that the integration of knowledge and expertise of geologists in natural hazards management is an essential matter in a modern society. Recent events such as the tsunami in Japan and Lorca´s earthquake in 2011 or the eruption of the island of El Hierro, on the Canary Islands, have reminded of the role that geological knowledge plays from a social and economic point of view.

According to the feedback given by participants, measures to enhance the integration of geological knowledge into hazard management approaches could be to:

1.- Include more hours of earth science and geological hazards in all levels of school education to raise the youngsters conscience and level of knowledge about their life on Earth and the potential hazards they are exposed to.

2.- Develop and use geological hazards maps compulsory in any urban development under the motto: No city under geological threat.

3.- Develop permanent information campaigns on geological hazards, addressed to citizens living in hazardous areas, to continuously remind them about the need to be aware and ready to respond. (One example on successful outreach work was given by the presentation of INVOLCAN on the Canary Islands)

4.- Train media staff on how to inform about hazards.

5.- Develop multidisciplinary monitor systems of geological hazards, combining ground observation and remote sensing systems in all geological hazardous zones to be able to react quickly in the event of a crisis.

6.- Create a network of organizations (research, civil protection, geological surveys, etc) with the aim of sharing experiences on natural hazards and preparing common actions.