

International Day for Disaster Reduction
Statement of USGS Acting Director P. Patrick Leahy:

The United States recognizes October 12, 2005, as the International Day for Disaster Reduction. This past year has attracted attention to the devastating impact to society from natural hazards that become disasters. Hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives, infrastructure was destroyed, commerce was disrupted, and the world was shocked and sometimes paralyzed by the realities of what Mother Nature can do. The deadly earthquake that occurred in Pakistan over the weekend, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the United States, landslides, erupting volcanoes, floods, wildfires, and, of course, the catastrophic December 26, 2004, earthquake and subsequent tsunami in the Indian Ocean demonstrate how we need to think globally and act locally when trying to prevent natural hazards from becoming disasters.

At the USGS, it is our goal to provide scientific research and analysis that help the public, the emergency management community, and policy makers make informed decisions on how to react to each hazard and safeguard society. In 2005, the USGS has proactively developed many products to help the public be aware of and prepared for natural hazards. Highlights include: debris flow advisories for Southern California; satellite data for tsunami disaster relief; development of the “Did You Feel It” section of the USGS Web site; *The National Volcano Early Warning System Report*; a new map of daily probability of earthquake shaking in Southern California; an economic impact study of a potential large earthquake in Los Angeles; and *The NOAA-USGS Debris Flow Warning System Report/Southern California Pilot Project*.

The USGS also supported the nation and victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita by transforming 911 callers’ street addresses into geospatial coordinates and plotting maps for potential rescue efforts; providing geospatial data and maps to organize information needed to deploy search and rescue crews, firefighters, medical teams, and reconstruction teams; developing detailed street-level search and rescue flood-status maps; documenting potential flooded infrastructure; and converting aerial flight video to maps for critical information. USGS scientists are also sampling impacted waters, marking and flagging high-water marks to document flooding and storm surge, repairing and replacing damaged streamgages to restore flood warning capacities; and installing temporary gages throughout flooded areas in southeast Texas and southwest Louisiana to provide water-level information to FEMA and others.

Our brothers and sisters worldwide need science to help them through some of these disasters, and we are here for them. I invite you to visit the USGS Web site at www.usgs.gov to see the many products and services USGS provides.

If we can use science to help save lives and minimize damage cause by natural hazards, the USGS will have achieved an enormous goal – helping to prevent natural hazards from becoming disasters and helping to build safer, more resilient communities worldwide.