

USAID Urban Search and Rescue Teams from Los Angeles and Fairfax Counties Train First Responders in Haiti

Build Haiti's Local Capacity for Disaster Response During Week-Long Training in Northern Haiti

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 17, 2010

Cape Haitian, Haiti — The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) facilitated Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) training to twenty-five volunteer first responders in Haiti this week to help build Haitian local capacity for disaster response, USAR experts from Fairfax County (VA) and Los Angeles County (CA) trained first responders from fire departments throughout the West Department from July 12-18, 2010. Those selected to attend the specialized training – nine from Cap-Haitien, eight from Carrefour, six from Limbe, two from St. Marc, and one from Delmas – are all volunteer firefighters.

The USAID-sponsored training will build the skills needed to locate and extricate trapped victims, focusing on the proper use of the search and rescue equipment donated by the USAR teams from Los Angeles and Fairfax counties to the Haitian Volunteer Firefighters Association in February 2010. The equipment, worth an estimated \$500,000, was used by the USAR teams deployed by USAID to help rescue 47 Haitians trapped under rubble after the major earthquake in Haiti on January 12.

“Search and rescue teams played a critical role in the aftermath of the earthquake, saving 136 people from the rubble,” said Carleene Dei, USAID Mission Director. “With this specialized training, Haitians will be better equipped to respond to hurricanes and other disasters.”

Chief Ardouin Zephirin of the Haitian Volunteer Firefighters Association said, “The things we learned this week will help us save lives and enables us to train other first responders throughout Haiti.”

Highlights of the USAR training include: instruction regarding safety, engineering, resource management, and rescue operations; training in lifting and moving portions of collapsed structures; proper shoring of portions of collapsed structures; and the construction and use of a rope rescue system used to lower a load under control.

USAID has been working to strengthen USAR capacities in Haiti since the November 2008 collapse of a primary school in Port-au-Prince that resulted in the deaths of 100 people, mostly children. In the aftermath of the school collapse, USAID deployed the Fairfax County USAR team to assist Haitian firefighters and other rescue workers. In 2009, USAID deployed an assessment team composed of USAID disaster response professionals and USAR specialists

from Fairfax County to Haiti for 10 days to help develop a USAR program support strategy. The team met with local authorities and technical specialists, as well as visiting fire services in five cities. With that visit, the Government of Haiti agreed to create a working group to develop a national USAR strategy and policy directions.

Since the January 12 earthquake that struck Haiti, the United States has invested more than \$1.1 billion in ongoing emergency response and recovery efforts, which includes \$689 million from USAID and \$453 million from the Department of Defense.