



Cities and Volcanoes Commission

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The Cities and Volcanoes Commission aims to provide a linkage between the volcanology community and emergency managers, to serve as a conduit for the exchange of ideas and experience between "volcano cities". It also aims to promote multi-disciplinary applied research, involving the collaboration of physical and social scientists, and city officials.

The Commission is open to all IAVCEI members with no charge for membership. We aim to develop a close link with the International Volcano Health Hazard Network (IVHHN), World Organisation of Volcano Observatories (WOVO) and Commission on the Mitigation of Volcanic Disasters.

<http://cav.volcano.info>

Volcanologists Serving Society

Economic and population centres of many small islands and small island groups, from St. Lucia to Comoros, could be impacted by volcanic activity. Evacuation of an island's entire population and potential long-term abandonment of the isle could be forced onto the agenda. Precedents exist, for instance Niua Fo'ou (Tonga) in 1946, Tristan da Cunha in the 1960s, Vestmannaeyjar (Iceland) in 1973, and Montserrat in the 1990s.

In each of these examples, long-term evacuation was unsuccessful--which could be considered a positive long-term result from cultural or sociological perspectives. Yet despite significant operational experience in dealing with such crises, questions raised by the events could be investigated more thoroughly.

How should volcanologists manage a situation where people wish to stay on their rumbling island despite the possibility of a large explosive eruption? Should volcanologists be managing that situation or should social scientists be in charge? Were any long-term psychological or sociological impacts, on the affected population and on the volcanologists, evident from the medium-term evacuations or the threat of long-term evacuations? How could negative impacts be reduced and positive impacts be enhanced? Why would some communities choose to remain or return despite significant volcanic risk?

Analogies exist with major cities overshadowed by volcanoes, including Mexico City, Tokyo, Auckland, and Seattle. Supervolcanoes could threaten continents from Yellowstone- or Toba-type eruptions. If we should be planning for low-probability high-magnitude events--a question worthy of debate--are volcanologists, politicians, and society ready to contemplate such catastrophe? What would the social impact be from formally investigating, publicising, and training for massive calamity?

Fascinating research questions emerge, but the impetus towards analysing the issues should be because they affect people: societies, cultures, livelihoods, and homes. People could lose all they have known from a relatively minor eruption on an island or near a city. No matter how obtuse politicians and other power brokers might be, volcanologists and other experts must always be sensitive to the human impact of their work by recognising that they serve society, not the volcano nor the peer-reviewed literature.

By Ilan Kelman <http://www.ilankelman.org>



Photos taken by Brad Scott, July 2005 in Montserrat, Caribbean. Fresh eruption (above), and a pyroclastic flow and lahar inundated building in Plymouth (below) .



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