

Crowdmapping devastating fires in Valparaíso, Chile

(This post was also sent to crisismappers.net. We are eager to share the experience, but are a small team in the middle of the coordination crisis right now, and cannot prepare a different version. We have updated info at the end of the post)

Hi,

Since April 12, forest fires around Valparaíso went out of control and 3000+ houses were burnt, leaving 12000+ people displaced, lots of them sheltered in different facilities. Collective response has been so strong and emotional, but also so uncoordinated, spontaneous, that people from all over the country gathered and sent (and keep sending) the usual mix of humanitarian aid + closet garbage in tons. Thousands of young volunteers have been going to the burnt area since the start of the fires, giving a relevant help, but also disturbing relevant response actions, even blocking the access to emergency vehicles in an (excessively) massive effort of debris removal, together with the affected population, a significant share of which, quickly returned to the devastated area and stay in the site of their destroyed house

In this scenario, on monday, 14th, when fires were barely controlled you could find all kind of uncoordinated efforts to provide health assistance, to population that was mainly not sick, but who had lost their houses. Public health system although well organized for pre-hospital management, Primary Health Care, etc, couldn't find detailed info about "what was happening" in the whole nine hills disaster area. Its topography is very irregular, severely difficulting mobility

In response to that coordination/lack of information situation, Universidad de Valparaíso Medical School, Medicina Todo Terreno - a locally based medical humanitarian aid NGO-, and Medical Association developed a Crowdmap based system, currently running and growing

Health Faculty students and young health professionals walk around the affected area in small groups exploring the situation with a Public Health orientation, looking for risks like sanitation or general and food security problems; they talk with people about water management, exploring and simultaneously educating; in sum, detecting issues at a grassroots level. Volunteers are briefed and

Weak connectivity makes difficult to load reports directly; so, field teams upload info when they come down the hills, back to Medical School.

Map's address is incendiovalpo.crowdmap.com

Although our proposal to start running the system was under request of Health Emergency Coordination Committee, it has been a slow process to get them to use the info.

Currently, municipal health system -which is responsible for almost all the affected people's health assistance- has started using it and uploading their own info.

High risk situations, like diarrhea cases or waste water discharge are directly reported to Health authorities.

Today, we have got help from other Public Health profs at School, in order to analyse data and propose interpretations to authorities.

We are very happy, because also today we have sent the first interpretation report to be included in the daily dossier of official info for the National Ministry of Health.

Regional and national health authorities have also their own user account with administration privileges, and we expect a progressive involvement; specially because fortunately our city has been a pioneer -at a national level- in GIS for Health and for Emergency and Disaster Management.

Students' union has decided to broaden the areas of info that will be gathered starting tomorrow, integrating other Faculties, like Architecture, Engineering. They will also use the tool to coordinate mid-term support effort.

On monday, we will present the system to the regional organization of local universities in order to involve them in the collective work of loading data in the system and taking info that they need.

UPDATE:

1. Regional governor's team has asked us to provide future scenarios prospections for sheltered people and specially for thos who stay in their destroyed houses' location and don't descend to shelters; based on the utility of grassroot level data that they can see.... and the difficulties for not trained people to extract info for maps data display.
2. Unfortunately, one of the walls in an area of high risk of colapse, that has been detected and reported by our system, finally fell over a young volunteer, injuring him. He has severe neurological damage. This sad incident raises for us the need of making our system more effective in helping
3. Some cases of communicable diseases have been detected and sanitary authority has been alerted, in order to allow them install epidemics control measures. Cases remain isolated. These data are not visible in the map for confidentiality reasons.

We will welcome all suggestions, critics or whatever support you can give us