

Message to Teachers

This booklet encourages children to help protect their community from natural hazards. It features a range of community activities based on ideas used by children in many countries. This booklet has been launched for the 1995 International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction.

Earthquakes, floods, severe storms and other extreme natural events have always been a part of nature and history. Recently, however, more people have become vulnerable to disasters than before, for reasons of rapid population growth, increasing environmental degradation and poverty. As a result, disasters kill one million people and leave millions more homeless each decade. Economic losses from natural disasters have tripled in the last thirty years.

Sustained community action can help reverse these patterns, and children have two essential roles in this process. First, through school activities that involve their community, children can raise public awareness about risks and motivate others to take protective measures. Children are also the key to instilling a "culture of prevention" in our societies, for a safer world in the 21st century. They can learn at an early age to respect our environment and understand development consequences, building habits that last a lifetime.

The booklet is designed to be used by schools around the world, to complement existing materials about natural disasters in each country. Targeted for ages 8-12, some parts can be tailored to both younger and older children. Learning about natural disasters can be included in studies about:

- your community;
- other communities or countries;
- the ways people view disasters - through religion, folk tales and art;
- the ways people interact with their environment.

You may also wish to invite professionals in your community to visit your class, such as the fire chief, the mayor, a meteorologist, a journalist...

We hope your class enjoys these activities. Please write to the IDNDR secretariat about how you have used them, so that your activities can be shared with other interested people around the world (*address on back cover*). Reproduction in part or in whole for non-commercial purposes is encouraged; please credit the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction secretariat; send information about publications, conferences or media where the booklet is a reference. If you are interested in producing a local language version or sponsoring reprints, please contact IDNDR.



Learning About Disasters

Nature is a source of life

Nature around us is a source of life. The sun makes flowers and trees grow. Soil along a river, or at the base of volcanoes, is fertile and good for crops. But too much sun or rain is bad for plants, and floods or volcano eruptions can destroy whole towns.

Earthquakes, floods, fires, volcanic eruptions, tropical storms, landslides, drought and pest attacks are part of nature, like sun and rain. These events affect almost every part of the earth. Long ago, people only had folk tales to explain these events. Today, science and history help us understand more about them. But we still have natural disasters.

What is a natural disaster?

A natural disaster occurs when three things happen at the same time:

- ▶ An extreme natural event occurs...
- ▶ at a place where many people live...
- ▶ and people are surprised by the event, because its effects are sudden or big.



Are disasters caused by nature or people?

Extreme natural events may cause disasters. But some events that seem "natural" are caused by people. Too much or too little rain may cause floods or drought. But floods and drought can also happen because we don't take proper care of the earth. If too many people take too much water, or cut trees faster than nature can replace them, the soil becomes poor and hard, and won't absorb water properly.

If we destroy parts of nature like coral reefs, forests or fragile mountain plants, we take away natural barriers that protect us from tsunamis, drought, landslides or other events.

Don't be scared, be prepared

As you can see, nature affects people, and people affect nature. This means that safety is not just luck. You can reduce the effects of disasters, if you are **aware**, you **share** and you **prepare**.

Be aware – Know your area's history. Ask your family and friends if they experienced disasters. Learn about weather patterns, movements within the earth, and how we affect the environment.

Share – Use drawings, school events, even newspapers, radio or tv to tell your community what you learn.

Prepare – Find out what warning announcements mean. Find safe places to go. Do drills. Make a survival kit...

