

AMERICAN CITIZEN SERVICES CONSULAR MISSION ECUADOR



A NEWSLETTER OF THE U.S. EMBASSY
FOR THE U.S. COMMUNITY IN ECUADOR

CRISIS RESPONSE EDITION



Cotopaxi Volcano | © 2018 KHBZZ

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NOTES FROM THE CONSUL GENERAL

Ecuador is home to a wide array of bio-diverse ecosystems and landscapes. From the long coastlines of Santa Elena to the mountainous Andes of Pichincha province, these backdrops offer a glimpse into the magnificent beauty of the country. Still, though the many landscapes attract both Ecuadorians and foreign tourists alike, it is important to recognize the possible dangers and crises that can occur. Within Ecuador, volcanoes and earthquakes pose distinct challenges in ensuring the safety for Americans abroad.

Ecuador is home to 50 volcanoes located throughout the country. Just south of Quito, Cotopaxi is one of the highest active volcanoes on earth, standing at 5987 meters (19,393 feet). In the past few years, Cotopaxi has shown signs of moderate activity, enough for Ecuador to declare a State of Emergency in 2015. While that declaration primarily called for individuals and the government to take precautionary evacuation measures, it also signaled a need for crisis preparedness.

In recent years, Ecuador has faced a variety of natural disaster threats that challenged crisis response networks to quickly respond to impending disasters.

On April 16, 2016, a 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Santa Elena. More than 660 people were killed, with vast stretches of coastline infrastructure destroyed by the powerful quake.

As Americans travel to Ecuador, they should plan effectively for disasters that may unexpectedly strike. In crisis situations, the U.S. Embassy works together with many host government agencies to ensure the safety of Americans who may be affected.



**Consul General
US Embassy Quito
Alexander P Delorey**



2016 Ecuador Earthquake | © 2018 UN News

LESSONS FROM THE 2016 EARTHQUAKE

2016 proved to be a difficult time for the country. The 7.8 earthquake which shook the country on April 16, 2016, tested Ecuador's crisis response systems to its fullest. More than 660 people died as a direct result of the powerful quake, and many thousands more were injured. As Ecuador began the difficult process of recovering from the earthquake, various international organizations and local response teams began to address the aftermath in the weeks after the initial shock.

Additionally, more than 7,000 buildings were destroyed and nearly 600 schools were impacted by the quake. The disaster highlighted the enormous challenges faced by Ecuadorian and international organizations when responding to a full-scale crisis.

Both residents and tourists are at risk when disasters such as the 2016 earthquake occur. However, effective emergency planning and crisis preparedness can help to mitigate the impact of such disasters.



2016 Ecuador Earthquake | © 2018 CNN

ECUADOR'S RESPONSE TO A CRISIS

Ecuador's response to large scale natural disasters consists of three main government and non-government entities. In situations of major natural disasters, including earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, Ecuador's response primarily relies on these groups:

ECU 911

<http://www.ecu911.gob.ec/>

The Ecuadorian equivalent of 911 in the United States, ECU 911 provides a single telephone number for individuals to contact when facing an emergency.

SECRETARIA GESTION DE RIESGOS

<https://www.gestionderiesgos.gob.ec/>

Ecuador's national system that includes prevention, mitigation, and reconstruction of communities and areas affected by disaster.

INSTITUTIO GEOFISICO

<http://www.igepn.edu.ec/>

Institute of Geo-Physics, responsible for the tracking of volcanoes, earthquakes, and other environmental risks to Ecuador.

You can find more information about each group by visiting the websites listed above.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE EMBASSY DURING A CRISIS

In the event of a large-scale emergency, please be prepared to evacuate. Often the unexpectedness of an emergency can make it difficult to travel. It is important to have set plans in place to effectively prepare yourself and those with you to escape danger.

The actions the Embassy takes depend on the nature of the crisis. In more minor situations, the Embassy may only aim to provide information on conditions in the country, such as warning about areas of unrest, how and where to seek help, and offering other useful advice. In more serious situations, the Embassy may recommend that U.S. citizens leave the country and, if commercial transportation is not available, provide departure assistance, as resources permit. Regularly scheduled commercial flights or transportation are always the preferred option when local communications and transportation infrastructure are intact and operating normally, even in situations where the Embassy has advised all U.S. citizens to depart. Our efforts are devoted to keeping the local U.S. citizen community informed of developments and travel options.

In extreme situations, where local infrastructure is damaged or severely compromised, the Embassy may work with the host government, other countries, and other U.S. government agencies to arrange chartered or non-commercial transportation for U.S. citizens seeking to depart. This could include transportation by air, land, or sea. While we partner closely with the Department of Defense, military transportation options are only used as a last resort. You should not routinely expect the U.S. military to assist when we issue a Travel Warning advising you to leave a country.

We strongly recommend that all U.S. citizens traveling or residing abroad keep their travel documents up-to-date. If your U.S. passport expires, you may be required to obtain a valid emergency travel document from the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate before traveling, which might delay your departure in the event of an emergency.

During a crisis, our priority is assisting U.S. citizens. In most circumstances, only U.S. citizens will be permitted to board U.S. government chartered or non-commercial transportation. Exceptions may be made to accommodate special family circumstances, such as when the spouse of a U.S. citizen is a legal permanent resident or "green card" holder; however, it is the non-U.S. citizen's responsibility to be sure he or she has appropriate travel documentation for the destination location. Any services provided to non-U.S. citizens are on a space-available basis after U.S. citizens are accommodated.

Often our embassies and consulates abroad cannot handle the huge volume of calls that follow a major crisis. We encourage you to contact us using Task Force Alert (see below for more details), special e-mail addresses established for public inquiries during a crisis, or our U.S.-based telephone number at 1-888-407-4747 (from overseas +1-202-501-4444).

The best way to contact us during a major crisis overseas is to use the Task Force Alert website (<https://tfa.state.gov/>) to send us information about yourself and your U.S. citizen friends and loved ones. The State Department adds such information to the database that we use to locate U.S. citizens and offer emergency consular assistance during a crisis. Please note that this service does not automatically notify emergency medical or law enforcement officials. U.S. citizens who are experiencing an emergency that requires immediate medical or law enforcement response should contact appropriate local responders. The Task Force Alert site should only be used to provide information about U.S. citizens who are in the affected foreign country; we do not collect information on non-U.S. citizens.



REMINDER

If your passport will expire in the next few months, now is a good time to renew. Summer in the United States tends to be a very busy time for passport renewals and the sooner you renew, the more likely you are to avoid long wait times.



For more information about renewing your passport, please visit the Embassy's website at: <https://ec.usembassy.gov/>

CRISIS PREPAREDNESS

Its always good to have a basic emergency plan in case of a crisis. The following is a sample Basic Emergency Kit Checklist that you can use to develop your own emergency kit.



BASIC EMERGENCY KIT CHECKLIST



- Water - one gallon of water per person per day for at least three days, for drinking and sanitation
- Food - at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food
- Any routine and/or special medications
- Battery-powered or hand crank radio and a NOAA Weather Radio with tone alert
- Flashlight
- First aid kit
- Extra batteries
- Whistle to signal for help
- Dust mask to help filter contaminated air and plastic sheeting and duct tape to shelter-in-place
- Moist towelettes, garbage bags and plastic ties for personal sanitation
- Wrench or pliers to turn off utilities
- Manual can opener for food
- Local maps
- Cell phone with chargers and a backup battery
- Important Documents (Passports/Birth/Marriage Certificates)

BE PREPARED TO TRAVEL



IMPORTANT NOTE

In situations of major natural disasters, we strongly urge all U.S. citizens to be prepared to depart the disaster zone and travel. Advanced planning can ensure you are ready to leave as quickly as possible, which may make the difference when it comes to keeping you and your family members safe.

We strongly urge all U.S. citizens to have their passports, as well as other important documents, such as marriage and birth certificates for themselves and their children, up to date and ready to go. These documents are often crucial and will allow U.S. citizens to get necessary help to evacuate danger zones.

We encourage all U.S. citizens traveling abroad, especially citizens who plan to be overseas for a significant amount of time, to enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). It is important that you keep your contact information up-to-date so that the Embassy can notify you or your designated emergency contact of developments and provide valuable information regarding unfolding situations or disasters.

Monitor our website, travel.state.gov, for updates, as this is our primary tool for disseminating important information during a crisis. Our Facebook and Twitter pages are also good sources of information. Rest assured that in case of a crisis, we will make use of all available modes of communication, including the internet, social media, TV, and radio, to keep citizens informed.

AMERICAN CITIZEN SERVICES (ACS) RESOURCES

SMART TRAVELER ENROLLMENT PROGRAM



The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) is a free service to allow U.S. citizens and nationals traveling and living abroad to enroll their trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

BENEFITS

- * Receive important information from the Embassy about safety conditions in your destination country, helping you make informed decisions about your travel plans.
- * Help the U.S. Embassy contact you in an emergency, whether natural disaster, civil unrest, or family emergency.
- * Help family and friends get in touch with you in an emergency.

For more information on how to enroll, please visit us at: <https://step.state.gov/step/>



JOIN THE AMERICAN LIAISON NETWORK

The U.S. Embassy in Quito is looking for Citizen Liaison Volunteers (CLVs) to join the American Liaison Network (ALN). CLVs are liaisons to the U.S. citizen communities we serve, helping us identify the needs of the community, proactively communicating information to us, and partnering with us to address security, safety, and health issues affecting U.S. citizens. If you would like to volunteer for the program (formerly known as the Warden Network), receive specialized training, and assist fellow U.S. citizens who are traveling or residing in Ecuador, please contact us. If you reside in Bolivar, Carchi, Chimborazo, Cotopaxi, Tungurahua, Napo, Orellana, Pastaza, Santo Domingo de los Tshachilas, or Sucumbíos provinces, we are looking for you!

(NOTE: We currently have sufficient numbers of CLV's for Pichincha province)

To learn more about the roles and responsibilities of being a CLV, please email ACSQuito@state.gov



REAL ID



THE REAL ID ACT

Beginning October 1, 2020, the federal government will require your driver license or identification (ID) card to be REAL ID compliant if you wish to use it as identification to board a U.S. domestic flight or enter military bases and most federal facilities.

The REAL ID Act established minimum security standards for driver's licenses and other identity documents and prohibits federal agencies from accepting for certain purposes driver's licenses and identification cards from states not meeting the Act's minimum standards.

Good news though - the U.S. passport is already considered REAL ID. Please visit the Embassy website if you wish to renew your passport. You may also wish to consider adding a passport card the next time you renew your passport, as the card offers a more-easily-carried alternative to a U.S. passport, yet is still REAL ID compliant.

For more information on the REAL ID Act, please visit <https://www.dhs.gov/real-id>

The American Citizen Services unit of the U.S. Embassy is ready to assist in all manner of non-emergency and emergency situations.

Routine services include first-time and renewal passport applications, notarial services, and report of the birth abroad of U.S. citizens.

Emergency services include helping victims of crime, issuance of emergency passports, and assistance with the arrest, financial destitution, or death U.S. citizens abroad.

Visit <https://ec.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/> to learn more or contact us via email at ACSQuito@state.gov