

Effective transport systems

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By Vaishali Honawar

As many as 25 percent of deaths among humanitarian aid workers result from vehicular accidents, highlighting the need for better and more effective transport systems in disaster-hit areas, speakers at a workshop on effective transport systems said.

"An increasing number of aid workers are killed or injured in road crashes... but road safety doesn't get much attention," said Martin Bettelley, the coordinator of the Fleet Forum. The Fleet Forum is an independent knowledge center focused on issues surrounding humanitarian fleets within the aid and development community. It supports efficient and effective humanitarian action by catalyzing the professionalization of fleet operations, increasing road safety and security, and improving the environmental impact of fleets.

The Fleet Forum is now engaged in trying to create a road safety guide,

Mr. Bettelley added. "Vehicles represent a huge cost in any operations. But only a few [humanitarian] agencies now have fleet management systems," he said.

There are other problems too when working in some disaster-affected regions. For instance, "in Darfur there are no roads. So how are you going to track your fleet?" he said. "What we need is to find innovative solutions for this problem."

Speakers urged that technology today can help in creating some of these solutions. "You can run fleets using new technologies. Gone are the days when computers would crash easily. We now have very reliable systems that will help run your fleet," Mr. Bettelley said. For instance, once a vehicle goes outside the compound, it can be tracked with satellite devices.

Google Earth, which is a free virtual geographic program that can be linked to all satellite systems, can also be used to track fleets, he added.



Speakers



Moderator: **Brian Hanrahan**



Martin Bettelley
Coordinator, Fleet Forum



John Abood, Team Leader/Contracting Officer, Transportation Division, Office of Acquisition and Assistance (OFDA), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)



Lionel Marre
Project Manager, OMIF - IT-Emergency Preparedness and Response Branch, World Food Programme (WFP)



Dr. Teo A. Babun Jr., Executive Director, Americas Relief Team

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Mr. Bettelley also emphasized the importance of using eco-friendly methods while running fleet systems. Vehicles represent a huge cost in any operation and therefore it is important to emphasize fuel-saving methods like driving gently, avoiding harsh braking, better vehicle control, and a potential reduction in unauthorized trips.

John Abood, a team leader and contracting officer in the Transportation Division of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), described some of the methods used by the agency and their PVO partners to ship 2.6 million metric tons of food and non-food items each year around the world. USAID is the principal U.S. government agency that extends assistance to individuals recovering from disasters, trying to escape famine and poverty and engaging in democratic reforms.

“Vehicles represent a huge cost in any operation and therefore it is important to emphasize fuel-saving methods.”

“Transport represent a substantial cost in any development operation and therefore it is important to apply efficient methods.”

“The U.S. Department of Agriculture buys food for delivery around the world day after day. These are high-value commodities and they have a shelf life. They have to be delivered quickly,” Mr. Abood said.

The U.N. World Food Program and very dedicated private voluntary organizations request commodities, which are put on ocean vessels and shipped to destination ports overseas.



From there the food is transported to distribution centers and made available to families, he added. Often, non-food items – tents, blankets, medical supplies, water treatment systems – are also donated through our USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance.

“We don’t send a little here and a little there. We are always consolidating cargoes so we have full ocean vessel, aircraft or container loads,” Mr. Abood said.

Our transport and logistics systems are highly organized, with our assessment and program teams coordinating logistics with our partners on a constant basis, he added.

He pointed out that small groups wishing to ship their cargo can often find help. While the USAID does not offer space to smaller programs, Mr. Abood described two programs that do: the Denton and Ocean Freight Reimbursement programs, which do. The U.S. Air Force also sometimes makes space available for cargo, he added.

Teo A. Babun, Jr., the Executive Director of Americas Relief Team, said the actual transportation of aid is one of the biggest questions faced by donors.

“After any crisis there is a reaction, usually unorganized, and small and large NGOs in the diaspora go into action,” he said. In the United States, he said, there are huge diasporas from around the world, all with a tremendous desire to help their communities.

“They put aid together and the shipments are small. But they don’t have funding or don’t remember that it has to be shipped,” he said, adding that the “problem in getting aid to countries is logistics.”

“We are trying to bring some sense to that process,” said Mr. Babun. The Americas Relief Team is a private sector collaboration of corporations and non-profit organizations created to help Latin American and Caribbean countries during times of crisis and disasters.

“Our main aim is to provide assistance to those in need after crisis by calling on NGOs to collaborate, consolidate and ship humanitarian aid to areas in need,” Mr. Babun said.

“The actual transportation of aid is one of the biggest questions faced by donors.”

The ART collaborates with freight consolidators in Florida, where it is based. “We have a bank of charity cargo operators. There are hundreds of cargo companies in the Port of Miami and we try to find ways they will give space.” In exchange, he said, the only benefit they can offer to these cargo operators is small tax relief or a trophy at the end of the year.