

Civil Defence and Cultural Property

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Resumen

Defensa civil y bienes culturales

La creación de un sistema de defensa civil en Argentina tuvo lugar en 1939, cuando las grandes potencias estaban ensayando sus propios sistemas. Desde 1969, el sistema argentino, denominado "Defensa Civil", está sometido a la autoridad del Ministerio de Defensa y su objetivo es responder a las necesidades de la comunidad cuando se producen catástrofes de todo tipo.

En las leyes y decretos establecidos para la capital, Buenos Aires, se fijan las reglas básicas de planificación, organización, coordinación, supervisión y administración de la defensa civil en la ciudad con vistas a responsabilizar tanto a la población como al gobierno.

El estudio de las especificidades de las catástrofes permite determinar las disposiciones de carácter general, así como las medidas necesarias para proteger a los habitantes y preservar los bienes culturales. Sólo la planificación - factor clave por ser un instrumento básico - permite dar una respuesta anticipada a una situación de emergencia, porque gracias a ella se analizan e identifican los recursos que se necesitan para cubrir los objetivos que se pretende alcanzar (salvamento de vidas humanas y bienes culturales, mantenimiento de las operaciones y transición de la situación de emergencia al restablecimiento de la normalidad).

Résumé

Défense civile et biens culturels

La création et le développement d'une défense civile en Argentine a vu le jour en 1939 au moment où les grandes puissances testaient leurs propres systèmes de défense. Rattachée depuis 1969 au ministère de la Défense sous l'appellation de "Défense civile", elle répond aux besoins de la "communauté" face aux catastrophes de toutes sortes.

Les lois et les décrets établis pour la capitale, Buenos Aires, posent les règles de base de la planification, de l'organisation, de la coordination, de l'inspection et de la gestion de la défense civile dans la ville pour une responsabilisation commune de la population et du gouvernement.

Etudier les spécificités des catastrophes permet de déterminer les mesures générales et d'identifier les décisions requises pour protéger les habitants et les biens culturels. Seule la planification, considérée comme facteur clé en tant qu'outil de base, permet de répondre en amont à une situation d'urgence car elle analyse et identifie les ressources applicables aux objectifs à atteindre (sauvetage de vies humaines, sauvetage des biens culturels, maintenance des opérations, retour à la normalité suite à une situation d'urgence).

The creation and development of "Civil Defence" all over the world went hand in hand with the increase in man's ability to cause death and destruction. Indeed, the first Civil Defence organisations were a response to the need to protect communities exposed to all the havoc that can be wreaked by war.

The foundations for a budding Civil Defence system were laid in Argentina at the same time as this was happening in the rest of the world. In June 1939, the "Antiaircraft Defence Command" was set up as part of the Argentine Army and included the Passive Antiaircraft Defence Division. In 1953 it was transferred to the General Aeronautical Antiaircraft Defence Command until, by Decree 8.732 dated December 31, 1968, it came under the control of the Ministry of Defence, adopting its current name of Civil Defence in 1969.

From that time on it began to attend to the needs of the "community" in the face of disasters of all kinds, laying the groundwork for a modern Civil Defence system in the country and commemorating "National Civil Defence Day" on November 23 every year in remembrance of the earthquake in Caucete, in the province of San Juan, which occurred on that date in 1977.

The National and International Emblem of Civil Defence - Defensa Civil

(Some countries change the name inside the emblem according to the department responsible in the country).

The city of Buenos Aires is covered by Law 22.418 with its Regulatory Decree 1.170/82 and, at the same time, by the "Metropolitan Master Plan" under Decree No. 2.252/99 which established the basic rules for the planning, organisation, coordination, inspection and management of civil defence in the city.

As a result of these principles and of current changes to jurisdiction in the city of Buenos Aires, Civil Defence is everyone's responsibility, "Community and Government", and also includes an active role played by "members of the community" prepared to do the work following rules, inspections, recommendations and specific training. This means that priorities can be established, responsibilities allocated, fields of action identified and assigned, and, above all risks "minimised".

Given that the majority of disasters share certain characteristics, although each type has its specific features, by studying them decisions can be made on general measures to be taken in the event of a disaster and on the identification of special decisions required to protect citizens from each of these disasters.

"Planning" is the process which lays the groundwork for the operation, setting the right response to an emergency; it is an ongoing, dynamic process and should include analysis of problems and resources needed to solve them.

The city of Buenos Aires (as is the case for any city in the world) has areas exposed to one or more risks, and we cannot rule out the possibility that several might occur in the same sector at the same time.

Planning needs to contain and regulate all specific plans for the different sectors, institutions and bodies involved and these need to coordinate amongst themselves to find joint initiatives and set targets.

Classifying the Emergency

A disaster is the interaction between a natural or technological agent and a vulnerable community which, due to its magnitude, creates a disparity between the resources needed to overcome it and the resources available to the community affected.

An interaction of this kind may produce victims, material damage and/or changes to the living environment.

The agents causing the disaster may be natural or manmade in origin, and the classification of disasters should be based on how these agents appear and how wide an area they affect. To plan action to be taken at all levels, it is essential to have knowledge of existing resources used to cope with emergency situations.

Objectives

The series of coordinated procedures implemented in response to an emergency is vitally important for all types of plan for:

- safeguarding human life;
- saving material goods (cultural and historic heritage);
- maintaining operations;
- restoring the situation to normal.

For the plan to be operationally effective the following points need to be considered:

- planning before the emergency actually occurs;
- hypothetical and risk analysis, prevention, damage limitation, training and keeping the community informed, early warnings, alarms;
- operations to be carried out during the emergency;
- information and restoration work after the emergency.

The plan established must be put into operation; once an emergency is in progress there is no time for training in theory, people have to follow pre-established procedures; success always depends on both human preparation and the preparation of the material resources available. There is a process of recovery and reconstruction; it is important to restore basic services to normal operation as quickly as possible.

Evacuating Buildings

Places of importance for cultural and historic heritage, museums, libraries, religious sites, historic houses, theatres, etc. must be covered.

When dealing with the problem of evacuation we must be aware that many of the deaths which have occurred in major disasters have been the result of bad luck and fate, but many others can be attributed to mistakes made in the emergency planning – when there was any.

This is not a matter of replaceable material losses but of irreplaceable human losses, although in our case, for sites classified as cultural and historic heritage, we can see a serious problem emerging for the safeguarding of pieces, objects, houses, churches, theatres, etc.

Evacuation: This is the action of clearing premises or a building where a fire or another type of emergency has struck, using a continuous and unobstructed path leading to an outside area unaffected by the emergency.

Fundamental bases must be covered in any evacuation plan where cultural heritage is at stake. A number of basic questions must be asked:

- should the evacuation be total or partial?
- is a human or automatic fire detection system essential? Is it important to have an automatic fire extinguishing system?
- is it essential to have a human, automatic, general or partial alarm?
- are the circumstances in terms of the human factor at different points exactly the same at all times of the day?
- what routes can be used for evacuation? What conditions apply to each part of the route? Fire resistance, smoke tightness (compartmentalisation), lighting, signposting, etc.;
- is a single evacuation path enough or are more needed, assuming this can be done in the building?
- where should the evacuation routes come out?
 - into the street?
 - into a courtyard?
 - onto a flat roof?
 - on the ground floor?