

winters will get wetter, summers warmer and sea- level rise will continue. In 2004, the Climate Centre and the Netherlands Red Cross started a climate programme with two components:

- an awareness project targeting local Red Cross branches;
- a heatwave project to start preparing the Netherlands Red Cross and others for extremely hot weather.

Top 10

Natural disasters by number of deaths - 2006

1. Earthquake, May	Indonesia	5,778
2. Typhoon Durian, December	Philippines	1,399
3. Landslide, February	Philippines	1,112
4. Heat wave, July	Netherlands	1,000
5. Heat wave, July	Belgium	940
6. Typhoon Bilis, July	China, P Rep	820
7. Tsunami, July	Indonesia	802
8. Cold wave, January	Ukraine	801
9. Flash Flood, August	Ethiopia	498
10. Typhoon Samoai, August	China, P Rep	373

Source of data: EM-DAT: The OFDA/CRED. International Disaster Database. www.em-dat.net

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Awareness project

Many Red Cross volunteers in the Netherlands have heard about climate change, but most consider it an environmental issue. They are hardly acquainted with the humanitarian consequences of a changing climate. The awareness project aims to explain why the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is concerned.

For this purpose, the Climate Centre has trained 22 young volunteers in delivering presentations on climate change and the way it affects Red Cross activities. So far, over 100 local branches have been visited out of a total of 338. In 2006 alone, more than 40 presentations were held.

At such presentations, our volunteers highlight the impacts of climate change at both the global and local level. They explain why the poorest people in the poorest countries are hit hardest. And they relate this to the daily work of local branches themselves: how can they prepare for an increasing number of extreme-weather events? Local branches in the Netherlands for example, are deeply involved in providing social care activities for, especially, isolated elderly and disabled people. Yet in the summer, these activities are often interrupted as volunteers go on holiday. When the country experiences more heatwaves, as predicted, this might need adjustment so that people who are most vulnerable to extreme heat are not left to fend for themselves.

The Climate Centre's presentations are being much appreciated. Local branches show a growing interest in the subject, and especially value discussing what they can do themselves.

Heatwave project

As heatwaves are identified as one of the main climate risks to impact Dutch society, and hence the work of the Netherlands Red Cross, the Climate Centre has started working to prepare people. In the context of its heatwave project, it developed a paper fan which not only provides some relief during hot periods, but also contains information on the risks of heatwaves and the simple measures people can take to protect themselves and others.

Simple yet effective measures for protecting people against the negative effects of heatwaves:

- Drink sufficient amounts of water.
- Avoid too much physical exertion in the afternoon.
- Take enough rest in cool places.
- Put wet towels on the neck.
- Close shutters, blinds and curtains.
- Cover the head when exposed to sunlight.

The fan proved an important communication tool in 2006. It was distributed by Red Cross branches to elderly and disabled people most at risk of dehydration and other heat-related problems. The general public was also targeted, to make people aware of how warm weather is not just pleasant but can even kill. And it did: the past summer had two heatwaves – in some regions even three. July was the hottest month ever recorded since records began in 1706. About 1,000 people died because of the extreme heat, according to national statistics.

To reduce the number of victims in the future, the Climate Centre in 2006 also ran a pilot aimed at equipping four large local branches to provide adequate assistance during heatwaves. The pilot addressed extreme heat in the context not just of social care programmes but also in relation to disaster response, and included volunteer training on dos and don'ts in caring for vulnerable people. It focused on organizing Red Cross help at a *regional* level (to anticipate the local absence of volunteers during holidays) and finding partners in other agencies in the area, like the health departments of local governments and home-care organizations. Although the pilot was concluded successfully in 2006, the Netherlands Red Cross is exploring possibilities for a follow-up in the near future.

On the national level, talks were initiated with the Ministry of Health and Environment Planning Organization RIVM to work towards a countrywide heatwave plan. The dialogue did not come easily: despite the extremely hot summer of 2003 severe heat was still not really considered a threat. Even when an agreement was eventually reached on developing a heatwave and cold-spell plan, there was little sense of urgency – until the heatwaves of 2006, one of which lasted more than two weeks. As attitudes changed completely, it was quickly decided to organize a national conference. Before the end of the year, this had resulted in a national plan for both heatwaves and cold-spells .

Both the awareness and heatwave projects were finalized in December 2006. Because of the enthusiasm of the local branches that started climate-related activities and the success of the national heatwave conference, it was decided that the Netherlands Red Cross would continue the heatwave project in 2007.

Available funding	€ 229,250 (from January 2004 to December 2006)
Donors	National Committee for International Cooperation and Sustainable Development NCDO, Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, Dutch Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment
Partner organizations	Netherlands Red Cross