

Flash Update

OWNER	Head of Office (HoO)
FOCAL POINT	Reports Officer or Public Information Officer (or other as designated by HoO)
PURPOSE	<p>A Flash Update is a short e-mail issued following a sudden-onset event where the impact and scale are not yet known. It is used to quickly provide the main facts of the event and what response may be underway by the local government and humanitarian partners.</p> <p>A Flash Update may lead to the production of an OCHA Situation Report if the situation merits a prolonged response by the humanitarian community. (If a Situation Report is required, refer to the Situation Report guidance and template, both of which are available on OCHA.net under Reporting Resources.)</p>
TRIGGER	<p>A Flash Update should be issued for early warning purposes, or as soon as possible following any sudden-onset event (earthquake, flood, storm, violent clashes, avalanche, fighting, etc.) that may have humanitarian consequences.</p>
FREQUENCY	<p>After the initial Flash Update is issued, subsequent updates should be issued as soon as additional information becomes available. This could be every few hours, once a day for a couple of days, or until it is clear that a Situation Report is or is not required.</p> <p>Give audiences an indication of when the next Flash Update will be issued. Let audiences know if this is likely to be the last e-mail in the series by including one of the following sentences:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) This is the last Flash Update on [emergency], unless unforeseen developments occur. For more information on [country], go to [website] or read the following regular report: [report name].2) This is the last Flash Update on [emergency]. A Situation Report will be issued [when]. For more information on [country], go to [website].
AUDIENCE	The primary audience includes humanitarian actors (response organizations, donors, government authorities, etc.) at the local and global level as well as relevant OCHA staff in the field and at Headquarters.
DRAFTING	The Reports Officer (or designate) is responsible for drafting the Flash Update with support from relevant staff in the office.
SOURCES	The main content sources will likely be the local government, media reports or field partners with a first-hand account of what has happened. Check the OCHA Virtual OSOCC (http://vosocc.unocha.org/) and GDAC alerts (www.gdac.org/alerts/) to see if information has been posted on the event.

CONTENT

A Flash Update should be limited to roughly 200 words and should include an informative title that summarizes the event. A Flash Update should not include exhaustive detail on the event. Instead it should state the facts and include a brief statement on future expectations, e.g. Is the situation likely to deteriorate or stabilize? What are the scenarios going forward? Be sure to include whether there has been a request for international assistance. (See annex A for sample Flash Update.)

MAPS AND GRAPHICS

A Flash Update is not expected to include maps or graphics. If it refers to a location that audiences may not be immediately familiar with, a reference map may be included or linked to in the body of the e-mail. Reference maps for all countries can be found here: <http://reliefweb.int/node/17490>.

CLEARANCE PROCESS

After completing the draft, the Reports Officer should send the Flash Update to the HoO for immediate clearance.

DISTRIBUTION

The Flash Update should be sent to the office's regular distribution list with a copy to relevant HQ staff and the OCHA duty officers (ochadutygva@un.org).

Annex A:

The following is an example of a Flash Update e-mail based on an imaginary scenario:

Subject: OCHA Flash Update 1 – Flooding in Eastern Province in xx Country

According to the National Disaster Monitoring Centre (NDMC), heavy rains have caused serious flooding along the Vista River. Verifiable estimates of affected people are not yet available, but census data show that 15,000 people live in the worst affected areas. Anecdotal reports indicate widespread damage to infrastructure and homes but few casualties. Access to affected areas is currently impossible due to washed-out bridges and continuing rains.

NDMC officials and humanitarian partners have teams standing by to conduct rapid assessments. These teams will also deliver emergency food, water and NFI rations, in line with priority needs identified after similar events.

Weather forecasts indicate that rains will taper off by 10 a.m. tomorrow, meaning that conditions are unlikely to deteriorate in the immediate term. The Vista River usually floods at least once a year. Calls for additional international assistance are unlikely at this stage, and OCHA does not plan to issue a Situation Report. This may change if assessments reveal more serious needs.

The next Flash Update will be issued as soon as more information is available. For more information, contact or visit: person@un.org and www.website.org.