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SOUTH AFRICA

SUCCESS STORY

Staying Ahead of Potential Disasters

Training in preparation for 2010 World Cup and other major events



Photo: USAID/South Africa/Reverie Zurba

Clifford Mokgathe assists Adele Swanepoel in a simulated rescue attempt during a USAID-funded search and rescue training.

“I’m proud to say I was trained by the best. Without USAID, this would not have been possible. I am glad to be a part of this experience,” said South African rescue worker Clifford Mokgathe.

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Search and rescue teams from Fairfax County, Virginia, and Los Angeles County, California, conducted an urban search and rescue training to strengthen the country’s preparedness for the 2010 World Cup and other major events. Both teams have extensive experience with urban disasters worldwide. During the training, 26 new local trainers and 60 technicians learned essential search and rescue skills.

Rescue South Africa is a free, public service that has been operational in South Africa since its founding in 1999 by Ian Scher, and has assisted other countries such as Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, Mozambique and Pakistan with emergencies. It approached USAID for help, and USAID arranged the training, selecting trainers from the United States.

Two of the South African training participants, Adele Swanepoel and Clifford Mokgathe, found the experience rewarding. Adele, who was the only woman trainee, remarked, “I’m glad USAID taught me and South African colleagues how to save lives when buildings collapse or similar disasters occur. Searching for patients and rescuing them is very complicated, and if you don’t do it the right way, people will die.”

Adele has worked through the ranks to become a full-fledged firefighter, health and safety coordinator and now training coordinator at the Potchefstroom Fire Department. She considers her job a “calling” to fight fires and save people’s lives. She is proud of her accomplishment as the only woman participant in the training. “I’ve proven myself and consider this experience a very good achievement,” she said.

Clifford, who is an Advanced Life Support practitioner, was attending to the “victim” during the simulated rescue effort. He said, “Thanks a million for all the time, preparation and knowledge shared. I’m proud to say I was trained by the best. Without USAID, this would not have been possible. I am glad to be a part of this experience.”