



## The ABCs of survival: disaster training for kids in Armenia

*Children in a small town Armenian town learn how to survive and help their community in case of a dam burst.*

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The European Interregional Center of Training Rescuers (ECTR) has come up with an innovative method of disaster mitigation: train those most vulnerable during disasters to take care of themselves. The ECTR has instituted safety rules and survival skills training programs for school age children living in settlements that are frequently inundated during typical flood times. Many communities of the European Southern Caucasus are vulnerable to floods from overflowing mountain rivers or reservoir dams bursts.

The ECTR developed three textbook manuals (on 'Floods', 'Safety on Water' and 'Safety on Ice') which provide theoretical and practical knowledge on the water-related risks for children of school age. The material is interactive and students can colour in the silhouette drawings which portray appropriate actions in the face of various hazards, and cover topics ranging from survival in water to first aid basics.



Students in Landjazat learn safety rules through training manuals

Between 1999 and 2003, 1,000 copies of the manual were published and distributed to students during training programmes. The training programme was instituted into the school system of numerous towns and villages. Both the training and the manuals have been amended following feedback and suggestions from teachers and parents.

The trainings have shown immediate result. The Landjazat village of the Ararat region of Armenia, is situated in direct proximity and under the dike of the Azat reservoir. The reservoir has a water volume of 70 billion metres<sup>3</sup> and the dike's height is 78 metres. If the dam were to burst, 33 settlements, including Landjazat village, would be washed away by the flood water, predicted to have a burst wave height of 40 metres and a velocity of 67 kilometres/hour. The water would reach Landjazat in a time of one minute.

In 2001, an ECTR led training was carried out in Landjazat secondary schools. At the end of training, 60 copies of the teaching methodological manuals were delivered to the rural school. The students quickly acquired and put to use the safety skills and knowledge. Their understanding was best evidenced by the urgent evacuation of the children to 'safe ground' within a minimum length of time during a safety exercise performed in October 2001 with the help of the Armenian



Emergency Management Administration, along with other emergency services. The training may not have completely removed the risk of a possible flood, but it increased the chances that the children of Landjazat can find their way to safety if disaster strikes. It helped mitigate the impact of future disasters.

In 2003, the ECTR plans to continue the in-depth training of students in other settlements situated in water risk prone zones near riverbeds and reservoirs. With additional funding, the organization intends to translate the training program into languages of other Southern Caucus countries and place relevant material on the internet for wider access.



Students administering first aid for drowning victims