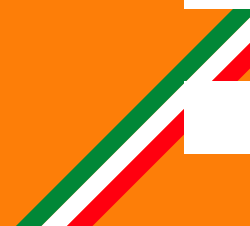


THE ITALIAN CIVIL PROTECTION NATIONAL SERVICE



*Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri
Dipartimento della Protezione Civile*





Civil Protection

The expression “civil protection” is to be understood as the series of actions and activities put forward by a country in order to protect human lives, goods, settlements and the environment from damages or from the danger of damages deriving from natural calamities, catastrophes and other disastrous events. With the Act n.225 of 24 February 1992, Italy has organised civil protection as a “National Service”. As stated under the first article of this act, the Civil Protection National Service consists of central and peripheral State administrations, Regions, Provinces, municipalities, national and territorial public agencies, and any other public and private institution and organisation present on the national territory. The President of the Council of Ministers provides for the co-ordination of the National Service and the promotion of civil protection activities through the Civil Protection Department.



Features of Italy's Civil Protection

In most European Countries, civil protection is a task assigned to one single institution or to few public structures. In Italy, instead, this function involves the entire State organisation, both at a national and territorial level. The civilian society also takes an active part in the Civil Protection National Service, mainly through voluntary organisations.

The reasons for such a choice, which distinguishes the structure of our civil protection in Europe, can be identified in the joining of an institutional motivation and an operative need connected with the features of our territory. From the viewpoint of the administrative system, a reform process has begun a few years ago with the objective of giving more relevance, authority and responsibilities to regional and local institutions. The reform is taking place by bringing about and developing according to today's needs the orientation towards decentralisation and enhancement of local institutions that are already included in the Constitutional Chart. Civil protection could not be left out of this process. This explains the growing importance the Regions and local administrations are assuming in the structure of the civil protection's national system, the increase of responsibilities and competence given to them, the articulation of decision and intervention levels, the complexity of management and coordination requirements of the system at different levels. The organisation model of our civil protection proves to be particularly adequate to a territorial context such as the Italian one, which presents a range of possible risks of disasters and catastrophes that are unknown to other European countries. Almost every area of the country is exposed to risks of a natural type. It is therefore necessary to have a civil protection system that is able to ensure in each area the presence of human resources, equipment, operative and decision-making capabilities ready to intervene in a very short time in case of disasters, but also to operate with continuity in order to prevent and, as far as possible, predict disasters.



The Civil Protection National Service

The system that has been set up is based on the principle of subsidiarity. In each Municipality, the first person responsible for civil protection is the Mayor, who organises municipal resources according to pre-established plans made to cope with specific risks in his territory. When a disastrous event occurs, the Civil Protection National Service is able, in a very short time, to define the event's significance and assess whether local resources are sufficient to face up to them. In case of necessity the support of Provinces, of Regions and the assistance of peripheral State administrations, will be guaranteed and co-ordinated by the Prefects. In the most serious situations, a national integration will take place: forces available on the spot will unite with any other staff and equipment necessary to meet the needs effectively. For the system to function it is important that the local, regional or national authorities take charge of operations according to the gravity of the event and within their competence. In fact, it is evident that in an emergency situation it should be first of all made clear who decides, who chooses, who assumes the responsibility of the interventions to be carried out. In cases of national emergency this role rests with the Civil Protection Department, whereas the President of the Council of Ministers assumes the political responsibility.

The activities of the Civil Protection National Service



Emergencies

It is of fundamental importance for civil protection to be a well-organised “emergency intervention machine”, able to reduce to the utmost the time that elapses between a disastrous event and the first rescue operations and interventions. The work of defining “emergency plans”, elaborated at a national and local level; the continuous updating of emergency procedures; the regular exchange of information between all levels of the system; the training activities for the staff and practice of all the components that take part in civil protection, and the development of technical means available are all actions dedicated to this purpose. Thanks to this systematic work and the increased correspondence of the structures present at the regional level, some satisfying results have been achieved in the last few years both in the reaction times and in the methods of rescue operations. The definition of necessary actions, as well as the capability to operate in order to reduce damages and start in due time the activities to restore normal living conditions in disaster areas have definitely improved.

Prevision

The history of great catastrophes in our Country has taught us that, in order to protect efficaciously human lives and the community's heritage, one should not rely solely on timely rescues, but dedicate energies and resources most of all to the prevision and prevention of calamities. Prevision activity is developed by means of an increasingly close linking system between civil protection and the world of scientific research, with new technological systems for collecting and processing data on different types of risk, and with data processing centres that are able to forewarn as early as possible of the probabilities of natural disasters. This series of technical-scientific activities ranges from the collecting of information in the area to their processing, to the interpretation of data according to models and simulations of disastrous events. It enables the civil protection, at all levels, to assess situations of possi-

ble risk, alert the intervention system ahead of time but, above all, to provide the competent authorities with the necessary elements, so as to make judicious and opportune decisions. This is the continuous, almost invisible, but fundamental work of the civil protection's prevision units, which are being transformed into a network of "Functional Centres" organised at a national and regional level. The use of technologically advanced networks (such as radar networks for weather forecast, the national seismography network, the sophisticated systems for monitoring volcanic activity), and of the best scientific and professional experience should make Italy's civil protection able to intervene immediately and, whenever possible, with preventive measures such as the evacuation of risk areas.

Prevention

The knowledge of the territory and of the various risks' danger thresholds is the basis not only for prevision activities necessary to make the rescue organisation efficient, but also to identify the directions and guidelines of the different kinds of possible prevention interventions. It is the civil protection's task to inform the competent authorities of useful interventions to reduce within acceptable thresholds the probabilities of disasters or at least to limit possible damage. The recent revision of the national seismic map is set in this context. As everybody knows, science is not able at present to forecast the occurrence of an earthquake. However, we have at our disposal rigorous, scientifically verified information on the different exposure to seismic risk of the Country's areas, which allows us to identify in which municipalities it is necessary to use adequate building techniques to increase the constructions' resistance in case of an earthquake. Apart from seismic risk, the civil protection system keeps under control in a more and more accurate way the various types of hydrogeological risks, the map of the areas more prone to forest fires, the areas where risks connected to a high level of industrialisation are more likely.





The Men and Women of the Civil Protection

The most important strategic resources of the civil protection system are the quality, generosity, professionalism, availability and training of the men and women who make up the system, police it, strengthen it and intervene in case of calamities and disasters. The Civil Protection National Service is made up of all the organised bodies of the State, starting from the National Fire Brigade, which for its specific preparation represents an indispensable component in each intervention. The Police Forces, the Armed Forces, the staff of the State Corps of Foresters, and the Italian Red Cross guarantee their unfailing support in all emergencies. However, Italy's civil protection can also rely more and more increasingly on voluntary organisations. From the first generous and disorganised experiences of spontaneous voluntary aid, like the "angels of the mud", who helped in great numbers in the 1966 flood of Florence, many other organisations have been set up, expression of the generosity and solidarity of many Italians. These voluntary organisations are nowadays structured at the regional level and there has been an increase in the number of available volunteers - the members of civil protection organisations are about 1.200.000 -, as well as in operative capacity, training, competence, experience, technical equipment and operative instruments. If until the 1980s voluntary organisations represented an auxiliary component of the forces in action, in the last few years they have provided, in situations of emergency, more than 50% of the human resources employed.

The Civil Protection Department

The Civil Protection Department of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers is the operative arm of the President of the Council, when it comes to coping with the protection of the country's people and goods, undergoing particular threats and dangers deriving from conditions of natural, environmental or anthropic risk.

The Department, which is today organised in 8 general offices and 43 units, constitutes the junction of the Civil Protection National Service. Its tasks include: promoting and co-ordinating the whole system; intervening directly in case of national disasters; defining intervention and action procedures common to the whole system; giving guidelines for legislation relative to risk prevention; supporting peripheral structures, particularly the ones with fewer resources; promoting and supporting the activities for the formation and growth of civil protection organisations; informing public opinion and promoting civil protection culture, particularly among young people; directing the setting up and management of information networks necessary for risk prevention; producing and managing exceptional regulations – the official orders - needed to enforce emergency interventions and deal with calamities, in order to reduce to the utmost the damage to people and things.

The Department's staff is highly specialised in emergency management, both from the administrative and technical-operative viewpoint. This has led the Government to request its intervention in all situations, even atypical ones, in which organisational and managerial capability in complex operations and the efficient and authoritative co-ordination of numerous administrations and institutions are necessary, as in the case of "great events". Or, more recently, in dealing with new risks that can also involve our country with the changed international situations, or in case of the spreading of dangerous and unknown epidemics.



International Relations

The Department also operates at the international level, in agreement with similar institutions of other Countries in a context of European collaboration. In addition, it co-ordinates civil protection interventions in foreign countries, thus representing a concrete example of solidarity and showing the operative, technical and human capacity of the men of our system.



At present, one of the main objectives of the Department is to develop international relations at a technical-scientific level, with the awareness that often, environmental risks are connected with factors that go far beyond national boundaries. For medium and long-term prevention, and particularly in the hydrogeological field, the international development of information and monitoring networks, the start of permanent relations with research centres, specialists and structures organised by the other European countries' Civil Protection have proved to be useful.

This new international co-operation enables Italy to verify and evaluate methods, procedures, operative techniques and organisational models in light of the experiences accomplished in other Countries, but also to export out of Italy the know-how of our civil protection system, with particular reference to the experience of Italian voluntary organisations, a unique example in the European panorama for its extension and organisation.

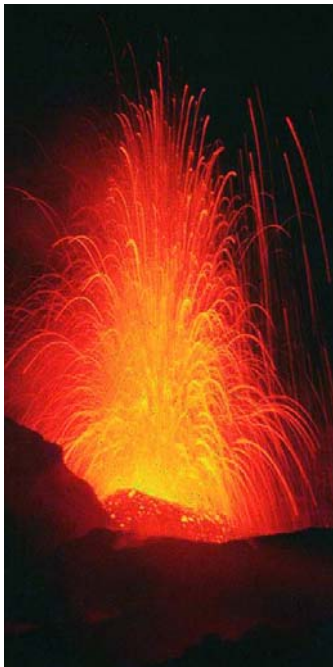
Risk typologies in Italy



Earthquakes

The Italian territory stretches over several tectonic plates, whose reciprocal movement periodically produces earthquakes. For this reason, Italy has a high seismic risk: it is estimated that about 20 million Italians are potentially exposed to earthquakes. This is a not foreseeable phenomenon, generally of very short duration, but with devastating consequences, as can be seen from recent history.

In fact, it should be considered that earthquakes often hit buildings that belong to Italy's artistic heritage and which, for the most part, particularly in the historic centres of our numerous municipalities, date back to ancient times, when anti-seismic building techniques were still unknown. Moreover, building speculation of the last decades has worsened this situation, which needs to be remedied by means of huge interventions and investments.



Volcanoes

Southern Italy has the highest concentration of active volcanoes in Europe: Vesuvius, Mount Etna, the islands of Stromboli and Vulcano, the Campi Flegrei. Volcanoes have been in the past the protagonists of disastrous eruptions, which destroyed entire cities and caused thousands of victims: suffice it to remember the Vesuvius' eruption that destroyed Pompei in 79 A. D. Today, thanks to the study and the continuous monitoring of certain forewarning phenomena, it is possible in many cases to predict an eruption ahead of time and consequently take important preventive measures.

Floods, landslides, landslips and coastal erosion

Hydrogeological risk represents for Italy a danger which is second only to the seismic one, in terms of loss of human lives and of damages caused to structures. The causes of such risk can be of natural origin, as in the case of exceptionally heavy rainfall and stormy seas. However, man's negative influence, which can be seen in unauthorised housebuilding, neglect of watercourses' maintenance, indiscriminate deforestation is, in most cases, a determining factor in the gravity of the effects.

In addition to the consequences closely linked to the violent force of water, there are also phenomena of a typically geological nature, such as landslides and landslips, which in turn widen, throughout time and space, the risk situations in which civil protection must intervene.



Forest fires

The Italian forest heritage, among the most important in Europe by extension and variety of species, represents an enormous wealth for the environment and economy, for the territory's equilibrium, for the conservation of biodiversity and landscape. However, every year thousands of hectares of forests are burnt by fires very often due to arson, connected to building speculation or human negligence and carelessness. The consequences on environmental equilibrium are extremely serious and the recovery time of the ecosystem is very long. Today, thanks to a strong sensitisation campaign and a more careful legislation, risks - albeit still very high - can be reduced, and fire-fighting interventions have undoubtedly become more efficient.

Industrial activities

In the last fifty years Italy has developed so much that, from being an essentially agricultural country, it has become one of the most industrialised countries in the world, not without paying the price of an increase in possible dangers. Industrial activities, in fact, can determine two main risk typologies. On one hand, the severe climatic changes and the damages to public health and to the environmental and artistic heritage caused by small, but constant detrimental actions: from the emission of toxic gases, to the discharge of polluting substances in the water or ground, from deforestation to excavations. On the other hand, some enormous potential risks determined by anomalous events of relevant proportions, such as the disaster in Seveso, the explosion of the nuclear power station in Chernobyl or the recent shipwreck of the oil tanker Prestige. The effects of this type of events are devastating and cause serious consequences, especially on public health, which can last for decades and reach areas that are far away from the disaster area.







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