Experts Work to Develop Better Tools to Predict Severe Weather

This is the VOA Special English Technology Report.

America's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is celebrating the one year anniversary of its Weather-Ready Nation project. Weather experts from across the United States have been working to improve the way the country reacts to extreme weather. They say scientific progress has made weather forecasts, or predictions, better than ever. But, they say the cost of severe weather on life and property is still too high.

NOAA says a new generation of equipment has already made its global numerical weather prediction system nearly three times faster in the past seven months. This is expected to improve NOAA's forecast models.

Scientists and weather experts have launched a similar effort in the Philippines. It is called Project NOAH -- the Nationwide Operational Assessment of Hazards.

Mahar Lagmay is the head of Project NOAH. He says his country needs high-resolution imaging to predict when and where natural disasters will strike.

"To be able to construct hazard maps you need very high resolution topography. To do the simulations of floods you do need high resolution topography."

He also says these images will be used to create smaller area maps, which will shape how people react to natural disasters.

"By doing local scale, or community scale maps, people can relate with the problem because they see their houses, they see their neighbor's houses, the bridge in their community, the river in their community in relation to the hazards - the flood hazards in particular."

Geologist Carlos Primo David also works with Project NOAH. He says the group depends on satellites, Doppler radar and hundreds of rain gauges across the country. He says the resulting forecasts are very detailed, and can even predict the intensity of rainfall.

The Philippine state weather agency used rainfall information from Project NOAH when Manila flooded in August. The weather agency also re-broadcast its warnings on the social networking website Twitter. And a color coded warning system was also put in place.

Mahar Lagmay says the project passed its first test. He says the government used the information to move people to safety.

"Relatively it was successful because what we wanted to avoid was mass death."

He says now the government has to get people to take severe weather events more seriously, and to actively prepare for the worst.