

MANILA, Philippines - Bulusan volcano in Sorsogon spewed ash again yesterday morning. Renato Solidum, Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) director, said the ash explosion happened at 6:45 a.m. and lasted for around five minutes. However, there was no indication of a hazardous explosion, he added.

Solidum said the steam-driven explosion produced a brownish to light grayish ash cloud, which rose to about 700 meters above the summit.

The latest ash explosions are typical of Bulusan's activities during restive periods, he added. Phivolcs also detected 28 volcanic earthquakes in the past 24 hours, higher than the 10 quakes recorded on Sunday.

It maintained Alert Level 1 at the Bulusan volcano which means that "no hazardous eruption is imminent."

Phivolcs raised the alert level in Bulusan from zero to 1 on Saturday and designated a four-kilometer Permanent Danger Zone.

It advised the public against venturing into the area of Bulusan due to the possibility of "sudden steam explosions."

Phivolcs urged residents near valleys and streams to be vigilant against sediment-laden stream flows in the event of heavy and continuous rainfall.

"The recent ash explosions are more or less typical of Bulusan's activity during its restive period. Phivolcs expects more explosions to occur in view of the volcano's recent reactivation," Phivolcs said.

Meanwhile, Solidum asked residents not to steal monitoring equipment on the volcano's slopes.

It would be of no use except as scrap metal, he added.

Residents given gas masks

Officials are distributing gas masks to residents near Bulusan volcano after it spewed another plume of ash.

Scientists said yesterday there was no need yet to evacuate any of the six towns in Bulusan's vicinity.

So far, only about 200 villagers took shelter in an elementary school.

One of the country's 23 active volcanoes, Bulusan blew ash and steam in 2007 but stopped short of a more powerful eruption.

In the latest spectacle yesterday, a grayish ash cloud rose about 700 meters above the 1,560-meter summit.

Bulusan is the fourth most active volcano in the country after Mayon in Albay, Taal in Batangas and Pinatubo in Zambales, having erupted 15 times since 1886.

DPWH names detours

The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) began to identify yesterday alternate routes in case a volcanic explosion blocks the national road network.

Danilo Dequito, DPWH Bicol Region officer-in-charge, said among the alternate routes are: East Coast Road; Abuyog (Junction DMH) to Gubat-Barcelona Road; Bulusan-Irosin Road; and Irosin-Matnog Road (DMH) for traffic from Manila to Matnog.

Traffic from Bulan, Sorsogon (travelers from Masbate) may take the West Coast Road from: Bulusan-Magallanes Road; Magallanes-Juban Road; and Juban-Sorsogon Road, he added.

In case of a massive ash fall and the Irosin Section is impassable, traffic from Matnog to Manila and vice versa may use the Buklusan-Barcelona-Gubat Road and Gubat-Abuyog Road, Dequito said.

Red Cross gives tips on safety

The Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC) advised the public yesterday to stay away from areas where landslides may occur during volcanic eruption, keep first-aid supplies within reach and make sure that a vehicle is ready for evacuation.

“Do not cut trees surrounding the volcano for these will serve as protection from the harmful effects of lahar,” the Red Cross said.

It also sought construction of a temporary but stronger shelter or building.

The Red Cross also advised the evacuation of people with lung disease if ash fall occurs during volcanic eruption.

“Cover your nose with a wet rag,” the Red Cross said.

“Stay inside the house or evacuation center. Be cautious, alert and calm if you need to go out.”

The Red Cross said motorists should stop driving during ash fall because it may obstruct their view and cause accidents.

“If the erupting volcano is near the sea, stay away from the shore,” the Red Cross said.

“A volcanic eruption can also cause tsunamis.”

The Red Cross advised local governments to strictly prohibit people from going to areas near the volcanic eruption and for them to stay in evacuation centers.

“The guidelines cover the time before a volcanic eruption until it ceases,” the Red Cross said.

“These do not include preparation for long-term, harmful effects of volcanic deposits and lahar.” – Helen Flores, Evelyn Macairan, Sheila Crisostomo, Cecille Suerte Felipe, AP