

Picatinny employees, equipment assist in Haitian relief efforts

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Picatinny employee Darlene Clovis poses with local children during her visit to Haiti. (Courtesy Photo)

PICATINNY ARSENAL, N.J. – According to CNN, the earthquake that struck Haiti on Jan. 12 only lasted about 35 seconds. However, it left enough destruction in its wake to inspire outreach efforts from across the globe. Here at Picatinny, employees have assisted both by sending equipment to the relief efforts and by volunteering to visit the country and help the Haitians one-on-one.

Picatinny provided equipment to U.S. Soldiers and watercraft that deployed as part of Operation Unified Response, the U.S. military's relief mission to Haiti.

Project Manager Close Combat Systems here delivered six Acoustic Hailing Devices to the 10th Transportation Battalion, 7th Sustainment Brigade from Fort Eustis, Va.

This equipment will supply necessary communication capabilities to six vessels in the waters off the coast of Haiti. Their mission is to provide humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and security in order to execute delivery of relief supplies and support, said Jim Reinhold, AHD Project Officer with PM CCS.

"The greatest overall benefit is that the device improves communication between the troops and the people they might encounter during the mission," he said.

AHD produces a highly directional sound beam that allows users to project warning tones and voice commands up to 1,000 meters.

The systems also include an MP3 player, so that the AHD operator can select from a large list of pre-loaded phrases and messages in various languages, including French or Haitian Creole, the official languages of Haiti. This will help crew members communicate with the armada of ferries, dinghies, and other small crafts in the congested Port-au-Prince harbor, as well as with other international relief vessels in the area.

"These systems provide the ability to attract attention and send an audio warning and intelligible information to other vessels in the area. That capability will help to open up transportation lanes in the crowded waters off the coast of Haiti and speed the delivery of much-needed relief and recovery supplies," Reinhold said.

The systems also provide a layer of protection to the U.S. maritime assets by helping Soldiers more effectively determine the intent of approaching vessels at a safe distance and potentially deter them from escalating to lethal force.

Picatinny employees have also assisted in the relief efforts. Darlene Clovis, a quality and mechanical engineer in the Armament Research, Development and Engineering Center's Quality Engineering and

System Assurance Directorate, visited Haiti on her own time to assist the non-profit group Appropriate Infrastructure Development Group.

Being fluent in Creole, a language spoken in Haiti, Clovis was an integral addition to the group, which spent more than a week in Haiti evaluating structures such as orphanages, churches and schools to see how structurally stable they were.

Clovis said her experience in Haiti was very positive and an opportunity she recommends everyone should experience if given the chance.

"We got to use hands-on engineering. While we were there we actually taught masons how to build earth-quake resistant homes, how to fix homes that are still standing and how to make them earthquake resistant if they're still able," Clovis said.

Additionally, she said she was humbled by the resistance and appreciation of the Haitian people in the midst of such trying times.

"Everyone is also thankful and grateful, so it made you more appreciative of the little things you do have," Clovis commented. Dan Napolitano with ARDEC Maneuver Support also visited Haiti on his own time as part of a mobile medical team through St. Catherine's church in Mountain Lakes.

The group visited sites around Port-au-Prince to assist earthquake relief efforts. Napolitano said his tasks ranged from setting up the mobile clinic to assisting in surgeries.

"The more we did, the more motivation we had because they were so appreciative," he said of the Haitians. "It was very upsetting to leave, but it was amazing to be down there and to be able to help."