

## GOVT ANNOUNCES AID MEASURES FOR CHILE VOLCANO VICTIMS

Contributed by Matt Malinowski  
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Chaitén Volcano continues to spew ash  
Photo by Lauren Andersen

The Chilean government on Thursday announced a series of tax-relief measures for victims of the Chaitén Volcano eruptions. Officials disclosed their plans as the Chilean military evacuated the remaining residents holed up in rural towns surrounding the volcano.

The eruption, which began early Friday morning, released a massive billow of ash that was visible as far away as Puerto Montt, some 200 kilometers to the north. Volcanic soot began to rain down, blanketing Chaitén and other area towns such as Futaleufú, and contaminating local water supplies (ST, May 5). NASA satellite photos released several days later showed the cloud of smoke spreading towards Argentina's Atlantic coast, some 500 miles to the east.

The ongoing eruption intensified between Tuesday and Thursday as authorities reported seeing lava emanating from the volcano's crater (ST, May 7). The volcanic activity prompted government officials to order the mandatory evacuation of local residents and all emergency workers within 50 kilometers of the volcano.

Still, a small group of civilians refused to leave two villages surrounding Chaitén, a municipality located 10 kilometers from the exploding volcano with the same name. The group included local radio show host Bernardo Riquelme, who refused to stop broadcasting for the few inhabitants left behind. All citizens were finally evacuated after government officials threatened to extract them from their homes by force.

Meanwhile, Chile's Tax Service (SII) announced a "huge tax pardon" for all inhabitants affected by the volcano. Accompanied by Finance Ministry officials and government Treasurer Pamela Cuzmar, SII President Ricardo Escobar said the plan calls for erasing all interest on residents' debts and exempting them from paying property taxes for at least four years. He said the measures alone will allow area residents to save a total of Ch\$1.3 billion pesos (US\$2.8 million).

"We have decided to take measures that we believe are appropriate for a disaster of this magnitude," affirmed Finance Ministry Undersecretary María Olivia Recart. "They are exceptional measures, and they will go a long way to alleviating the stressful situation facing many local residents."

Chile has one of the world's most active string of volcanoes. It is home to some 2,000 volcanoes, 500 of which experts say are potentially active. Around 60 have erupted over the past 450 years.

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