

U.S. Engineers, Haitians Remove Debris in Turgeau

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PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (NNS) -- Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) and the Army Corps of Engineers are helping residents of Turgeau, an inner-city district here, recover from the devastating Jan. 12 earthquake by removing massive amounts of debris from the city streets, businesses and homes.

"The goal here is to clear the right of ways and sidewalks of Turgeau so the people can get back to their homes and start their lives again," said Project Leader Mel Acree, NAVFAC Mid-Atlantic.

Since March 18, the joint-service team together with the contracted services of Contingency Response Services, a joint-venture company comprised of Dynacorp and Parsons, have accounted for more than 11,000 cubic yards of debris removal and employed 100 Haitians in a cash-for-work program designed to empower the local labor base.

The use of local Haitians through the cash-for-work program has provided more than just income to the local Haitians, it has served as a learning experience as well. "The Haitian (employee) aspect is something new (to the contracting process)," said Civil Engineer Corps officer, Lt. j.g. Bryan Beyer, NAVFAC Mid-Atlantic.

"Their safety culture isn't quite like ours. There's a lot of training and walking them through the process to get them to understand why we have certain rules and why we try to keep them safe."

The foreign relief workers have been well received by the Turgeau community and are empowering local leaders like Romelus Pierre Ronal, the president of the local assembly of Turgeau, who immediately volunteered to help the engineers clean up his community.

"I'm working here with my people to help them have a better life," Ronal said.

The engineers said they have felt welcomed from the day they arrived in Turgeau. "When we come to the job site the Haitians say a lot more than thank you, Acree said, "they call us family."

Being in Haiti to witness the destruction of the January earthquake has left an impression on many of the Department of Defense workers.

"I've seen a lot here," said Chad Adamson, Army Corps of Engineers, St. Louis. "There's really nothing that can compare. I've seen things here that I could have never imagined. The people here definitely have a hard life."

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