

Map volunteers help Haiti Search & Rescue

Volunteers from OpenStreetMap.org – the website dubbed “the Free Wiki World Map” – are providing essential maps to Search & Rescue and Relief teams responding to the Haiti earthquake.

A lack of up to date post-disaster maps of the region hamper SAR teams’ efforts to reach collapsed buildings and makeshift refugee camps.

But, since the earthquake, OpenStreetMap volunteers have used daily updates of satellite imagery to plot an accurate map of the latest situation in Haiti. These maps show those roads which are still passable; hospitals; refugee camps; and – a stark but urgent need – cemeteries.

The maps are being printed out by aid workers, and also downloaded onto hand-held GPS units. One SAR worker from Virginia, USA, told the project:

“I wish there was a way that I can express to you how important your OSM files were to us. Having these detailed maps on our GPS units is a big deal.

“We transferred the street level maps onto as many Garmin units as we could before sending the American rescue teams on the streets. The team members are thrilled to have this resource you have created. Their faces 'light up' when I take their GPS unit and tell them that I'm going to give them street level detail maps.”

The OpenStreetMap volunteers began working on the map immediately the earthquake struck, enabling, for example, the World Food Programme to use the map in their initial damage assessment. Now, as aid arrives in the country, the mappers are expanding their work to include key routes from the Dominican Republic.

OpenStreetMap.org is a map website with an ‘Edit’ button, where anyone can use their knowledge to improve the map of their local area. Thousands of its volunteers across the world, from Iceland to the Philippines, have now switched their attention from their own countries to Haiti. E-mail messages forwarded from aid workers are helping OpenStreetMap’s volunteers to prioritise their work where it is most needed.

The work would not have been possible without the generous provision of aerial imagery by GeoEye, DigitalGlobe, Spot, ErosB, and Google. The latest images are available for mappers to use in under 24 hours from the satellite capture. City maps provided by the New York Public

Library, UN, US Government, and European Commission, among others, are helping mappers to name each street.

OpenStreetMap volunteers are anxious that all those working in Haiti are aware that these maps are available. You can view the map at www.openstreetmap.org.

See wiki.openstreetmap.org for details of how to contribute, including introductory videos.

Press contacts

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Notes for editors

Images are available on request.

Map images may be captured directly from www.openstreetmap.org. For example, an area of Port-au-Prince showing refugee camps and hospitals can be seen at

<http://www.openstreetmap.org/?lat=18.5406&lon=-72.33896&zoom=16&layers=B000FTF>

Please credit [OpenStreetMap](http://www.openstreetmap.org) (CC-BY-SA licence).

Further information on OpenStreetMap in Haiti, including known uses by aid workers:

http://wiki.openstreetmap.org/wiki/WikiProject_Haiti

OpenStreetMap aims to create and provide free geographic data such as street maps to anyone who wants them. The project was started in 2004 because most maps you think of as free actually have legal or technical restrictions on their use, holding back people from using them in creative, productive or unexpected ways.

Unlike other maps, OpenStreetMap publishes its street and path data for people to use in any way they see fit. Its 200,000 'citizen cartographers' have, between them, mapped 40 million roads so far.