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## Central America gets new storm alert system

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A new system of early forecasts for storms and bad weather, with alerts every 30 minutes, will be in operation this summer in Central America and southern Mexico, the intergovernmental Group on Earth Observations announced yesterday.

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The system, dubbed NextStorm, will provide short-term forecasts of powerful electrical storms or heavy rainfall likely to cause flooding.

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The news came while Costa Rica is still fixing up the damage in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Alma.

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NextStorm represents “a major advance in putting earth observation data and other tools to work in protecting people and livelihoods in southern Mexico and throughout Central America,” GEO Secretariat director José Achache said.

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”We're thinking in terms of text-message alerts to cell phones and other kinds of easily accessible announcements, all with the aim of minimizing or avoiding injuries, deaths and economic losses due to bad weather,” said Jacqueline Schafer, assistant administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, which is heading the project.

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The new system, according to Panamanian meteorologist Annette Quinn, “will provide greater security for the region. Ports and air terminals, in particular, will benefit, while dock workers will be better protected against lightning.”

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For two years the new system has been on trial to identify and analyze in a period of between 30 and 60 minutes the specific elements that each storm is bringing, such as lightning, strong winds, turbulence or sudden floods.

**-EFE**

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