

Volcanic Hazards: Lahars

Lahars, sometimes called mudflows, are a mix of water and volcanic ash. Lahars travel along valley floors for long distances, endangering towns that might be many miles from the volcano.



Lahars can happen when fresh ash mixes with river water; sometimes, the heat from an eruption melts snow which then mixes with ash. Heavy rain can also trigger lahars by washing ash left by previous eruptions into rivers.



Lahars can bury whole towns in minutes. The flows are a thick liquid that sets hard, like cement.

If people are warned in time, they can escape a lahar by going to high ground. There was no warning system at Armero, in Colombia. In 1985, a lahar destroyed the town, killing 22,000 people.



Lahars are incredibly powerful, picking up debris like trees and boulders the size of houses.

Lahars cut through the ground, eroding deep valleys.

