

Disasters cause losses of 222 billion dollars in 2010

Agency France Press, 11-30-10

ZURICH — Man-made and natural disasters generated worldwide economic losses of 222 billion dollars in 2010, more than three times last year's figure, the world's biggest reinsurer Swiss Re estimated on Tuesday.

This year's major catastrophes claimed 260,000 lives, most of them in the deadly Haiti earthquake during which over 222,000 people were killed.

Other disasters with high casualty rate included Russia's heatwave which left about 15,000 dead and summer floods in China and Pakistan which killed 6,225, said Swiss Re.

Yet, despite the three-fold jump in economic losses, the impact to insurers rose only 34 percent from a year ago to 36 billion dollars, as the most devastating disasters occurred in regions which had little insurance coverage.

"While most of the costliest events caused by the earthquakes in Chile and New Zealand and the winter storm in western Europe were covered by insurance, events like the earthquake in Haiti and floods in Asia were barely insured," noted Thomas Hee, chief economist of Swiss Re.

It was the earthquake in Chile alone which left the insurance industry with the biggest bill, costing 8 billion dollars.

February's western European winter storm cost the industry 2.85 billion dollars while New Zealand's earthquake cost 2.7 billion dollars.

The reinsurer also included losses from BP's Gulf of Mexico oil spill, saying that the explosion cost insurers property claims of about 1 billion dollars, although this figure could still rise.