

Mount Etna erupts

The largest and most active volcano in Europe is the 3,340 metre high Mount Etna. Over a million people live in the Mount Etna area and the eruptions have caused considerable problems for them.

Mount Etna erupted most recently in 1971, 1983 and 1992. In 1971 the eruption began with a huge explosion that sounded like a jet aircraft taking off. This was followed by a huge fireworks display when red hot ash was thrown hundreds of metres into the air and molten lava poured down the mountainside. In this eruption most of the ski slopes and cable car stations were destroyed and a research observatory near the summit was completely wiped out.

The 1983 eruption began in March and continued several months. Millions of tonnes of lava gushed out of the crater and engulfed a hotel, three restaurants, 25 houses and many orange groves and vineyards. The lava flowed at an average speed of 15 km per hour and at one time threatened to bury several small villages in its path. Eventually a diversion was made and, after a series of controlled explosions, the lava was diverted and villages saved.

There are different possibilities to help the people in case of an eruption. You can block the lava flow by dropping concrete blocks by helicopters or you can build earth barriers to slow down the flow and divert it. People also use water sprays to cool the lava and slow it down or they blow up the edge of the lava to speed its cooling and form solid lava walls. And very often the surrounding region is evacuated.

- 1) Describe three different negative consequences of an eruption.
- 2) What can be done to help the people in the Etna area? Name at least three possibilities.