

[<< back to story >>](#)

Portland Press Herald Maine Sunday Telegram

Mainer gathers data to help Haitians who lost limbs

By JUSTIN ELLIS, Staff Writer

February 5, 2010



Courtesy: Joe Guerra
Adam Cote of Portland, right, logs information from an earthquake victim in Port-au-Prince last week. He is assisted by Gaelle Simon, an interpreter.

Though he had seen the streets of Bosnia and Iraq as a soldier, the devastation in Haiti was unlike anything Adam Cote of Portland had ever encountered.

"I had seen the pictures, but to get that 90-degree perspective from pictures doesn't really prepare you," Cote said. "It was really staggering. The amount of damage, from a structural perspective, was similar to pictures you see of Berlin after World War II."

Cote was in Haiti for more than a week with Global Relief Technologies to collect data on amputees who need artificial limbs and on the structural integrity of buildings in the wake of the earthquake.

"I've never seen so many casualties," he said. "I've never seen so many overflowing hospitals."

Cote, a 2008 congressional candidate, is senior vice president of Global Relief, a Portsmouth, N.H.-based company that works exclusively in technology to help aid efforts in disaster areas. Global Relief partnered with Helping Hands for Haiti, a nonprofit group that does rehabilitation work in Haiti hospitals. Many of those facilities were destroyed, so the group is now working out of field hospitals.

In Haitian cities like Port-au-Prince, Jacmel and Leogane, Global Relief's team worked with New England Brace, a New Hampshire-based maker of prosthetics, gathering names, measuring limbs and collecting photos for a medical database.

Cote said it's estimated that at least 2,000 people had amputations after the Jan. 12 earthquake. In the short time his team was there, it collected more than 900 structural and medical assessments, 150 of which were for amputees.

New England Brace will use the amputee data to begin crafting artificial limbs. Dennis Acton, its information technology manager, said the company will share the data with other prosthetics manufacturers to speed up the process.

"In the old days, you would grab a load of supplies and head in and you'd hope you had everything you needed to see the patients," Acton said. With detailed information in a database, the manufacturers will be able to craft better limbs, he said.

Acton said the only facility in Haiti that makes prosthetic limbs was destroyed. Work is being done to have a temporary facility operating soon, he said.

For most of the time Cote was in Haiti, his team slept outdoors, eating mostly energy bars and one meal a day. "It was basically like camping in a disaster area," Cote said. "I think the military prepared me for that."

Information makes all the difference in the aftermath of a disaster, when many institutions are not operating and international aid organizations and emergency workers are trying to help, he said.

"Anybody who can bring (information) together in one separate database without ownership, which is what we've done, it becomes invaluable," he said.

Global Relief Technologies examined what types of buildings were destroyed and the level of destruction. Cote said that information will help the Haitian government as it tries to rebuild.

The company also provided reports to the military about the capacity of working hospitals, including how many beds were open, the number of doctors available and what surgical procedures they were equipped to do.

Cote said his experience in Haiti will stay with him.

He recalled meeting a man whose house had collapsed, killing his wife and two daughters and pinning one of his infant daughter's legs, which was later amputated.

"I have daughters the same age as his girls," Cote said. "It's something I think about quite a bit."

Staff Writer Justin Ellis can be contacted at 791-6380 or at:

jellis@pressherald.com

Copyright © 2010 MaineToday Media, Inc.

[<< back to story >>](#)