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## Scientist Expects St. Vincent's La Soufriere Eruption to be Bigger Than 1979's

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**Ash rises into the air as La Soufriere volcano erupts on the eastern Caribbean island of St. Vincent, seen from Chateaubelair, Friday, April 9, 2021. By. AP Photo/Orvil Samuel**

KINGSTOWN, St. Vincent, CMC –The lead scientist monitoring the eruption of the La Soufriere volcano, Professor Richard Robertson, Saturday said he expects the current explosive eruptions to be bigger than what occurred in in 1979.

Robertson said that overnight the seismic tremors that have been ongoing at the volcano generated energetic venting and that the size of the tremor peaked between 8.00 p.m. and midnight (local time) on Friday, and slowly declined over the next few hours.

Audible rumblings accompanied by ash venting occurred throughout most of the night with ashfall reported throughout St. Vincent and some areas in Barbados.

Robertson, speaking on the state-owned NBC Radio, said that there was a continuous period of the venting of mainly ash up into the atmosphere.

Friday's explosive eruption came three months after the start of an effusive eruption at the volcano. Before that eruption, a new dome, which was 950 meters (3,117 feet) long, 105 meters (344 feet) high, 257 meters (843 feet) wide and about 13 million cubic meters (42 million cubic feet) in volume, had formed at the volcano.

Robertson said that all that material has been destroyed and emitted into the atmosphere, adding that the scientific team from the Seismic Research Centre of the University of the West Indies (UWI) believes that all the material in the top several hundred meters of the magma chamber has been pushed out and what is now being emitting, is new material coming from deep inside the volcano.

"We don't know how much of that material was down there that wants to come out," Robertson explained, noting that his team has a number of things to get an idea of this, including gas measurements.

"But, currently, we don't know that and we don't know how long and how much material still can come up to the top. I think the next couple of days, the data we collect from collecting the ash and analyzing it and also the gas would help us to determine that....I would be surprised if the activity and the amount of activity we have is smaller, is less than '79 kind of scale.

"We all know what size the '79 eruption was and how long it went on for. I would be surprised if it is less than that duration.... I would be surprised if it is not at least of that scale...in other words, if it is going to produce more ash than '79 did. It is going to end up being, more than likely, a bigger eruption than '79 was."

Robertson said visibility is poor but his team has accessed satellite imagery which suggests that there is now a hole at the volcano after Friday's eruption.

"There is now an opening now ... but where the material is coming out, where it originally came out, it now has nothing there. That is where the material is now coming out and going up in the air....

"The other thing is that it seems that a substantial amount of the 2021 dome has gone. It's been destroyed.... All that 13 million cubic meters of material has mainly been destroyed in the activity that we have there, so far."

So far, it does not appear that much damage has been done to the 1979 dome, Robertson said.

"It's almost like you are almost resetting it to how it almost looked before the [explosive] eruption started. That is kind of how up there looks, but [with] an opening on the south-western side where the dome emitted from originally."

He said that with most of the 2021 dome having been destroyed, this means that the volcano has put out into the atmosphere more than the volume of material that made up the 2021 dome.

The geologist said the bulk of that material has gone to sea, as has always been the case. He said the material that has fallen into the sea was not enough to cause an environmental hazard and is likely to have more impact on atmospheric conditions.

Robertson said that with the volume of volcanic ash produced during the eruption, it is believed that most people in St. Vincent have had some deposit of ash in their community.

The volcano is expected to continue to produce ash, although there might be some breaks, and Robertson again urged people to put in place measures to minimize the impact of the ash.

Prime Minister Dr. Ralph Gonsalves has also urged people not to venture into the capital, saying that the ash from the volcano is making it extremely difficult for the shopping areas to be opened.