



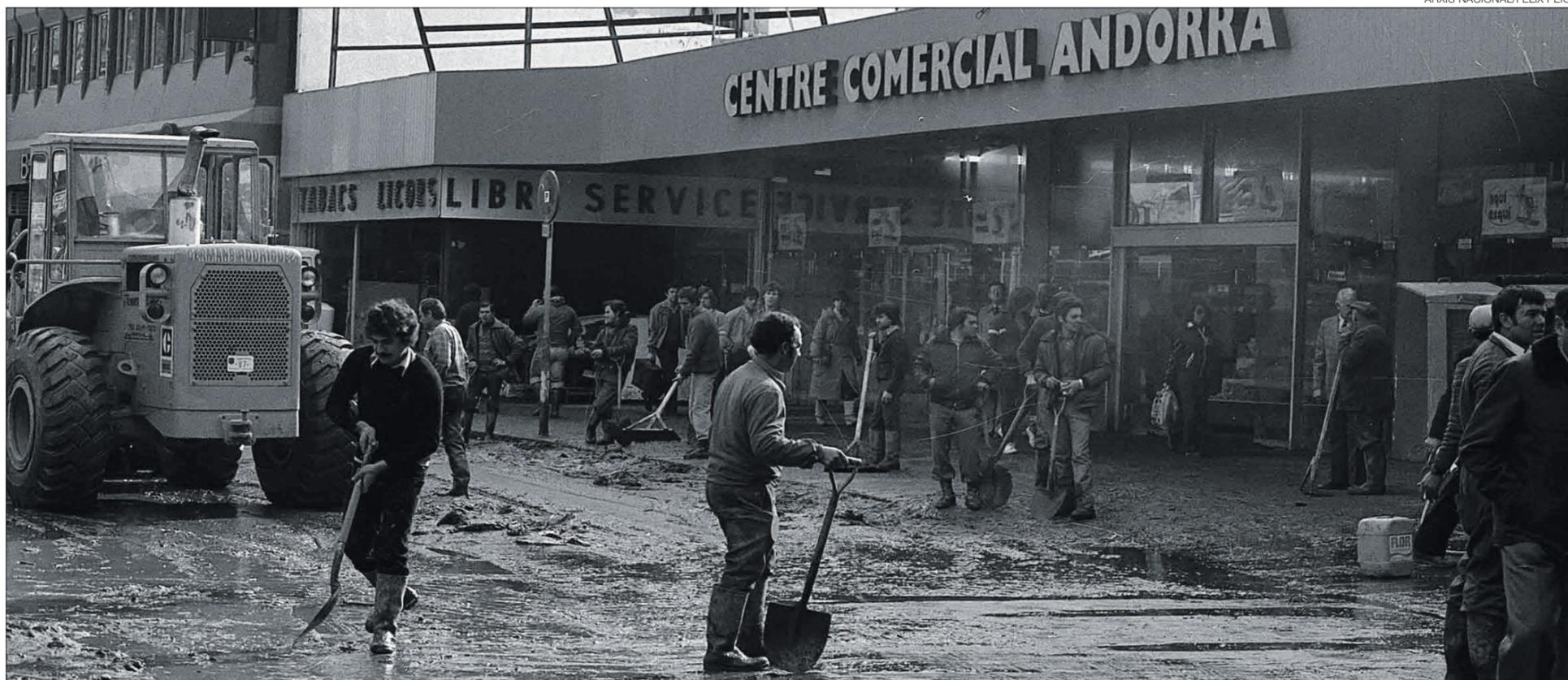
Tribute ▶ The devastating floods that occurred in 1982 meant a before and after for the Principality

40 years of the downpours

Andorra commemorates the floods that affected the country between November 6th and 9th

The director of Civil Protection explains the changes that have been made to prevent another disaster

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▶ An archive image of Meritxell Avenue after the floods of 1982.

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Between November 6th and 9th, 1982, one of the most important weather episodes that Andorra remembers took place and is known as the Flood of 82. This week marks 40 years since this event took place, which took the lives of more than a dozen people and caused copious material damage. This catastrophe was very significant, not only in the most pessimistic way, but also made the population aware of the fragility of the territory in the face of the possibility of the phenomenon repeating itself and, for this reason, the country went to decide to start creating measures to avoid the possible consequences of a similar misfortune in the future. As a result of this need, the first Civil Protection Law was born in 1984, which laid the first foundations for later, in 2007, the development of the Department of Civil Protection, which since its inception has focused all efforts on the safety of people. «It was necessary

to create a structure to coordinate major emergency situations, transfer information to citizens and organize the rest of the services through emergency plans, and this is somewhat what has been done all these years», assessed the director of Civil Protection, Cristian Pons.

Over the course of these four decades, many changes have taken place compared to the organization that existed in 1982. One of the most important was made in 2017, with the installation of the nine hydrological stations that monitor in real time the river flows to be able to anticipate possible floods and anticipate overflows or impacts within the territory. The department also today has an action plan for meteorological phenomena, which is accompanied by a series of internal protocols, which benefits from the National Meteorological Service to anticipate these events. «In the past, the country did not have a service that would inform us of all the situations or adverse phenomena that were approaching our territory», recalled Pons, who also explained that this



Cristian Pons

DIRECTOR OF CIVIL PROTECTION

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tool publishes notices that allow to obtain data in two or three days view on what phenomena can reach the Principality and how they can impact it. Among the management improvements, communication with the population is also noteworthy, which is now more direct and immediate, thanks to social networks. In this way, Civil Protection and the Government can send advice or alerts when necessary.

In case a disaster of this magnitude occur again, the department has also established collaborations with the Red Cross, municipal Civil Protection, support groups and has an agreement with the Hotel Union of Andorra in case it is necessary to carry out re-accommodations. In this sense, the director of Civil Protection observed that «a similar situation may or may not happen, but at least we all have the information and we are prepared». Recently, this July 14th, the new Civil Protection Law has also been approved and entered into force, which precisely ensures that more efforts are focused on preventive actions that

allow to improve the response in emergency situations. So, among others, the text foresees giving tools to identify the risks that the territory has, along with the preparation of emergency and self-protection plans, and the creation of the National Emergency Center, which is «very important for the country and which is linked to other massive early warning systems for the population that are also interesting to have», pointed out Pons. This law, however, must follow a timetable and, therefore, these actions will be developed progressively. However, the director of the department pointed out that «I want to understand that at least it opens the doors so that, in a few years, we can have other elements to counteract situations related to more complete phenomena».

Nevertheless, she assured that «everything that has changed since 1982 is quite a lot, but I prefer to look to the future and see what the law provides, what opportunities we have from now on, than not to say what we don't have done so far». ≡

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«I thought I was losing my life»

Joan Boteller remembers the flood as a member of the Fire Brigade and explains how he avoided a large gas explosion on the night when the country began to flood due to the rains

EL PERIÒDIC
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«When the floods started, I was on duty», begins to remember Joan Boteller, who was 21 years old and had recently joined the Fire Brigade when the flood disaster of 1982 started. «We went to work in at 9 p.m. the day before, November 6th, which was Saturday, and it was a relatively quiet day», he continues to explain. That was the night when the rain episode started. On Sunday morning there was some minor flooding on a couple of terraces. «In fact, we were a little surprised by the fact that in Pas de la Casa water had entered some basements», he confesses. Resulting from the combination of a warm front and cold air in the atmosphere, a phenomenon known as a cold drop, the rain intensified from the evening of November 7th. People began to panic when the situation worsened in the parish of Sant Julià de Lòria, where «they sent us first, with a Citroën DS that went through that lake of water as best it could», says Joan, at the same time making it known that at that moment he saw how the water began to leave the river, although «it was not clear enough because it was very dark». The first thing he did then was to notify the Fire Department of the situation. «I said: listen, if this rises more, it will reach some station of the FEDA transformer, which supplies energy to part of the population».

Once the work in Sant Julià were finished, he returned to the premises and the managers sent him to one of the gas stations, together with the gas manager, the owner, another firefighter and a body manager, where «we saw that the water was already invading the facilities». Suddenly, a sudden blow burst a gas distribution valve, and it started to come out inflamed. «The person in charge, the owner and I tried to close the taps in the ducts so that no more gas came out, but it was almost impossible to get to the end because the lig-



►► Above, an image of Tarragona Avenue affected by the flood. Below left, firefighters help a group of people evacuate a building. Below on the right, firefighters are working on the road.

ht came and went.» Possibly, a spark was what suddenly generated an explosion inside the station. «For a moment, everything was a cloud of gas», he visualizes, at the same ti-

me confessing that, then, «I remember pushing the flames away from the fire with my hands». Joan was admitted to the hospital that same day at 9:00 p.m., with second- and

third-degree injuries to his hands, and first-degree injuries inside of his body. Once at the clinic, he was treated in intensive care. In the following two years, he received repa-

rative operations. Unfortunately, one person also died in that incident, the owner's son.

Although he does not remember what happened after he managed to get out of the facility alive, Joan assumes that his fellow workers let the gas that came out ignited burn until it reached certain limits to ensure it. «We didn't save a single person, but we certainly prevented a greater evil for the entire population», he says. What would have happened if they hadn't closed the valves? «If all the gas had exploded, the disaster would have

«We didn't save a single person, but we certainly avoided a greater evil for the population»

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been unimaginable.»

«Every year, I live this day with sadness», explains Joan, who also states that «there was a moment when I thought I was losing my life. In fact, I was in the hospital for about eight days and they didn't know if I was going to die. Therefore, when they took Amadeu Rosell, who had a heart attack there, I thought that I was next». Even so, Joan managed to recover. «Every November 7th, I celebrate another birthday», confesses the firefighter, now retired, who gives thanks to the fact that «fortunately, that day I was able to save myself so I could live with my family and enjoy every minute of the rest of my life next to them». ≡

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