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Deadly trash avalanche in Guatemala

At least three people died and some 20 were missing in a Guatemalan garbage dump when a mountain of trash, including human remains, collapsed on people foraging there, emergency workers said.

Hundreds of police and bystanders searched for the missing under the avalanche of old tires, broken glass, rotting food and human remains, rescue worker Jose Victor Chavez said from the scene.

Dozens of people come every day to the scrapheap to take jewellery from the bodies of Guatemala's poor dumped in the landfill when their relatives cannot afford to maintain their graves in the neighbouring cemetery, Chavez said.

At least six children working alongside relatives to search for valuables in the trash were among the missing, he said.

A police spokesman put the death toll at four and said 14 people had disappeared.

Scores of Guatemala's poor search for scrap metal and other recyclables to scrape out a living in the sprawling dump despite dangers of landslides during the rainy season.

"Yesterday it rained all afternoon and into the night, saturating the land and causing the landslide," said police spokesman Gerson Contreras.

Four people died just a month ago at the same landfill in a similar incident.

"Because of the rains and what happened before, the authorities have been trying to stop people from going there, but their need is so great they just kept coming," Contreras said.

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