



CIVIC FORCE

NEWS LETTER Vol.7

(May, 2016)

Kumamoto Earthquake



We set up emergency tents at two locations in Mashiki Town which was severely damaged by the Kumamoto Earthquake. As of May 2016, our tents have been used as an evacuation area for more than 200 people. Since this tent village is scheduled to be closed at the end of May by order of the town authority out of concern with heatstroke and such, the emergency relief team is busy looking for alternative sites.

BCF / A-PAD Japan / PWJ

Emergency Relief Activities in Kumamoto where Aftershocks Continue

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Date of issue: May 2016 Publisher: Civic Force
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In Kumamoto Prefecture, where a level 7 earthquake occurred on April 14 followed by repeated aftershocks, 49 people have been killed so far and one person is still missing. Due to the effects of prolonged life in evacuation, some people have lost their lives from the heavy burden on their bodies or deterioration of chronic illness.

The Kumamoto Earthquake has inflicted enormous damage on housings. The confirmed number of damaged houses as of May 18 is: 4,569 fully destroyed, 11,629 half destroyed, and 54,491 partially destroyed. These numbers may further increase because the investigation is still in process. Furthermore, it is reported that more than 1,000 housings have been damaged in Oita Prefecture.

Also, according to the disaster headquarters, over 9,900 people are staying in 226 evacuation centers within Kumamoto Prefecture as of May 18, more than one month after the disaster. In Mashiki Town where there is a particularly large number of evacuees, more than 3,200 people are still living in evacuation centers. In addition, there are people who continue sleeping in their cars at night.

We will report on our support activities for the Kumamoto Earthquake in this special issue of the Civic Force News Letter, which is usually published quarterly.



The following articles describe the aid activities Civic Force continues to execute since March 11, 2011, in response to the Great East Japan Earthquake, as well as its emergency response activities for disasters that occur in various regions of Japan.

Searching for the Missing with Rescue Dogs

At 9:26 p.m. on April 14, an earthquake of seismic intensity 7 occurred in Kumamoto Prefecture. Immediately following the quake, Civic Force started collecting information. At around 11 p.m. the same day, Civic Force formed an emergency relief team in collaboration with its partners, the Asia Pacific Alliance Japan (A-PAD Japan) and Peace Winds Japan (PWJ). The team traveled by land from its base in Hiroshima to Soryo District and Yasunaga District of Mashiki Town in central Kumamoto, which had been particularly heavily damaged. The team checked the damage situation and carried out search operations for the missing with rescue dogs.

Then, following another earthquake of intensity 6 upper that occurred at around 1:25 a.m. on April 16, the emergency relief team departed again for the disaster-affected areas. The team arrived at Minamiaso Village at 10:00 a.m. the next day and began collecting information on the damage situation and missing persons. At around 11:30 a.m., a second team with rescue dogs flew in by helicopter to join the first team. Both teams performed search operations for missing persons trapped under damaged houses in cooperation with the police, fire brigade and self-defense forces.

(Right) Search operation in Minamiaso Village; Rescue dog "Hulk" searching for missing persons trapped under damaged houses
(Below) Emergency relief team heading for residential areas of Minamiaso Village along an earthquake-damaged road



Pick Up !

Utilizing the Strengths of Three Organizations for More Effective Support for Disaster Areas

The joint emergency relief team, consisting of Civic Force, A-PAD Japan and PWJ, was formed based on the support experience from the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 2011. The joint team conducts rescue drills in Hiroshima Prefecture a few times a month so that it can quickly respond to disasters by utilizing the strengths of each organization such as overseas rescue experiences and ties with enterprises.

The joint team carried out search operations for missing persons after the Nepal earthquake of April 2015 and the Taiwan typhoon of September 2015. Furthermore, the team supported isolated evacuees in Joso City of Ibaraki Prefecture during the disaster caused by heavy rains in Kanto and Tohoku regions, also in September 2015. The emergency relief team includes "Yumenosuke," a rescue dog that was saved by PWJ just before being culled. Yumenosuke is playing a vital role at the front line of disaster-affected areas together with another rescue dog "Hulk."



Emergency relief team preparing to depart for disaster areas in Kumamoto by helicopter

Delivered Relief Goods to Small-Scale Shelters

About a week after the earthquake, some reports such as by media and SNS said, “the relief goods have been delivered enough to the disaster-affected areas.” But in fact some small-scale non-registered shelters were short of the relief goods.

Our team, based in a multipurpose gymnasium in Mashiki Town, had procured and distributed relief goods. In addition, we started to supply goods to small-scale shelters on April 21, so that we could figure out refugees’ hidden need, which enabled as many refugees as possible to receive necessary goods.

Sankyo Lease Co., a local company in the disaster hit area, lent our team its warehouse free of charge to temporarily store the goods sent from companies and people across the nation. With a cooperation of the staff from Yahoo Japan Co. who came over to the area on April 21, we listed facilities such as local community centers, nurseries, kindergartens and senior care centers to make inquiries by phone about the presence of evacuees, the number of evacuees, and their needs for the moment. The answers were written down on a facility map to decide the route for efficient distribution to deliver the goods with several two-ton trucks. The goods we supplied included clothing like underwear and socks, and Japanese summer oranges and nutritional supplements to make up for the poor diet and the lack of vitamins, as well as food and water. At the request by the evacuees, our team also obtained and distributed household goods like toothbrushes and paper dishes.

Change of Clothes for the First Time in Five Days: Some Evacuees Moved to Tears

Some evacuees were moved to tears when received the relief supplies, saying “We have not been able to change our clothes for more than five days, since we evacuated without bringing anything when the disaster occurred. Besides, we have truly suffered from the shortage of water to clean our clothes. I am glad we can finally change into new underwear.”

In addition, the principal of the Mashiki Kindergarten, which was opened as an evacuation center for the local residents, explained the situation: “There are many people who cannot bring out their clothes from their homes because their houses were completely destroyed due to the earthquake. When I told the evacuees that the clothes would be delivered, all of them were glad at and began looking forward to it.”



The relief activity has had supports such as by the companies with which Civic Force built a relationship in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake. They have also offered relief supplies to the disaster-affected areas.

To Take Back Smiles to Kids Living with Stress

On May 5, 2016 – “Children’s Day”, an event for children was held at Harutake Elementary School in Kumamoto City, one of the evacuation centers, for the first time since the earthquake occurred. About 80 local children joined the event.

Local residents including Mr. Narutoshi Nakazato, Chairperson of the Parent and Teacher Association (PTA) planned the event. Mr. Nakazato explained the reason to host this event as follows: “As the aftershocks continuously occurred, we have hesitated to let our children play outside because of the danger surrounding our children such as a destruction of buildings.”

Due to the earthquakes, 155 elementary and junior-high schools in Kumamoto City, Mashiki Town, Minamiaso Village, etc in Kumamoto Prefecture, have been temporarily closed, which will last until around May 10. It is said that the circumstance caused the children to stay indoors at evacuation centers, their homes, or their relative’s homes like shutting themselves away.

Therefore, hoping that the children would “play outside in full swing,” the parents held games and picture-story shows at the playground of the elementary school. The children also picked up trash on their way to the school. One of the elementary school students said smilingly, “I have never played this much since the earthquake occurred. I am very happy to meet my friends again.”



Civic Force gave away snacks such as Japanese summer oranges, Karinto – traditional Japanese snack, and chocolates to the children at a break during playing outside.

Provided Tents to Kumamoto Earthquake Evacuees Sleeping in Cars

As of April 17, more than 180,000 people in Kumamoto Prefecture, and nearly 12,500 people in Oita Prefecture were evacuated from their homes. In Mashiki Town, one of the worst hit areas, the inside and outside of the gymnasium was overflowing with more than 400 evacuees.

In response to the situation, our team began setting up large-size emergency evacuation tents “Balloon Shelter” on April 17. These tents have been provided for the use by the evacuees since April 20 including those who had slept in their cars and the families with pets.

The emergency tent can be used for many purposes such as to secure an accommodation space as well as to protect wind and rain in the affected areas. It has a floor space of 3 m x 5.5 m (equivalent to the space of ten tatami mats) and a height of 2.1 meters, which accommodates about six persons. These specifications are the same as those adopted by UN agencies. The tent is foldable and can be set up in short time.

Civic Force has a regular stock of the emergency tents. Immediately after the Kumamoto Earthquake, we delivered 160 tents from the disaster prevention storage located in Fukuroi City, Shizuoka Prefecture to Kumamoto Prefecture in cooperation with Fukuroi City Office, with which we have a disaster assistance agreement.



People who had been sleeping in their cars showed an expression of relief and said, “I can finally lie stretching out on the floor.”

Operating Tent Village for 212 People of 61 Households

Civic Force has established and been operating evacuation centers with the emergency tents. As of May 19, 2016, the evacuation centers were located in two places; Shibafu Plaza (lawn field) next to Mashiki Town Gymnasium (sheltering 39 households comprised of 149 persons and 59 pets), and Saishunkan Hill Top, which was located in the property of Saishunkan Co., Ltd. (63 persons and 31 pets of 21 households).

In the tent village in Shibafu Plaza (lawn field), we open a café daily from nine a.m. to five p.m., providing the evacuees with relief supplies and coffee service, and lending an ear to their voices. The cafe has gradually developed as a place for the evacuees to interact with each other. In the tent village of Saishunkan Hill Top, such equipment as shower rooms, bath rooms, laundry machines, heat insulation sheets, and terrestrial digital broadcasting antennas was installed to improve the living conditions as much as possible. We also started a pet sitter service and opened a dog run.



Some evacuees bring flowers and notebooks to the café of the tent village, wishing “it would be of help to bring a smile to people.”

With the needs of prevention measures for heat stroke, local farmers had collected and placed shading nets for the evacuees.

Adult Volunteers who Support Our Activities in Affected

It is not straightforward for us to manage the tent village because the needs of the evacuees constantly change depending on weather and other conditions. Our activities would not be possible without the help of the adult volunteers who have come from across the nation.

Ms. Chiyomi Nagata joined us from Saga Future Design Foundation as a volunteer in late April for ten days, and engaged in setting up tents and managing the café. She worked with us actively and flexibly as a member of the staff while communicating with the evacuees including the families with pets.

Mr. Tomoaki Hamada, an office worker, who said “I took a long holiday during the Golden Week to come to Kumamoto,”

joined our support activities to set up the tents as well as make interview with the evacuees who continue to sleep in their vehicles. Also, with his experience in accounting work in Tokyo, Mr. Hamada took charge of the management of residents’ information, which changes on a day-to-day basis.

