

Special Report I: Police Activities and the Great East Japan Earthquake

At 2:46 pm on March 11, 2011, the largest earthquake in Japanese recorded history occurred, its epicenter falling off the Sanriku coast. The earthquake triggered massive tsunami waves, striking the Tohoku region and other areas along the Pacific coast and inducing the failure of nuclear power plants and other facilities.

Since the earthquake, many police units from across the nation have been dispatched to support local prefectural police in Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima and other affected areas to ensure a unified national police structure. Police have engaged in a wide variety of activities in harsh environments to ensure the safety and security of affected areas, including evacuation guidance and rescue of victims, missing persons searches, response to nuclear disaster, and various traffic measures.

This was truly an unprecedented catastrophe. Police have substantially lengthened the earthquake response in terms of missing persons searches, response to nuclear disaster, recovery and reconstruction of the affected areas, and expect various complications from the far-reaching, extensive damage. This disaster has created special circumstances quite different from past disasters; entire towns have been washed

away by the tsunami, and traditional local communities have collapsed.

This special report will introduce the concerted efforts the police are taking to handle these issues under such circumstances.

Section 1: Damage Situation and Police Organization

1. Damage Situation

As of June 20, 2011, the death toll nationwide from the Great East Japan Earthquake and its aftershocks was 15,467, with missing persons rising to 7,482.

Of the 13,135 bodies autopsied or otherwise examined in Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima prefectures in the first month following the earthquake, 92.4%, or 12,143 persons, were found to have died from drowning.

2. Police Organization

In response to requests for assistance from Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima prefectural public safety commissions, a gross total force of approximately 389,000 officers and Interprefectural Emergency Rescue Units—as many as 4,800 a day—from across the nation were dispatched to support Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima police forces as of June 20, 2011.

Figure 1: Police organization at maximum daily capacity



Column: Interprefectural Emergency Rescue Units

Interprefectural Emergency Rescue Units (IERU) were established on June 1, 1995 as disaster expert teams in prefectural police departments nationwide based on their invaluable experience in disaster policing during the Great Hanshin Earthquake, which occurred on January 17 of the same year. Currently, IERUs are comprised of a Search and Rescue Unit, a Traffic Unit for securing emergency traffic routes and other traffic-related work, and an Autopsy and Identification Unit. These units are always in training to refine their skills.

Section 2: Main Police Activity

1. Victim Evacuation Guidance and Rescue

(1) Evacuation Guidance

Immediately following the earthquake, the prefectural police in the affected areas quickly guided the evacuation, helping people in regions at risk for tsunami damage evacuate to elevated areas.

Case: Two newly recruited officers from the Soma Police Station in Fukushima were in a train on the JR Joban Line when the quake hit. They immediately checked passengers for injuries, reporting it to the train crew. Recognizing that a large tsunami warning had been issued, they then proceeded to guide the roughly 40 passengers to town hall in an

elevated area, with one officer leading and one in the rear. Hearing a dreadful noise, the trailing officer turned around to see that a muddy stream had come to just hundreds of meters away, carrying vehicles, houses, and other debris with it. The officer then stopped a light truck that just happened to be passing by, put a woman who had injured her leg and was lagging behind the group in the passenger seat, climbed into the truck bed himself and escaped the disaster. While the train itself was derailed and swallowed up in the tsunami, all passengers escaped safely.

(2) Search and Rescue

IERUs and riot police units were dispatched nationwide to join with the prefectural police in the affected areas to rescue victims and search for missing persons. They rescued roughly 3,750 victims.

Case: At 4:05 pm on March 20, 2011, four officers from the Ishinomaki Police Station in Miyagi Prefecture on a search of downtown Ishinomaki found a boy seeking help in a collapsed house. The boy told the officers that his grandmother was still inside. One of the officers entered the house and searched, finding an elderly woman lying on top of a fallen closet. The woman was rescued with help from firefighters, and the two were transported to the hospital with a helicopter provided by Kagoshima prefectural police.

This rescue was nine days after the initial disaster.

(3) Autopsies and Identification

1) Performing Autopsies and Identification

Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima prefectures housed a great number of victim remains. At their peak, the prefectural police nationwide dispatched up to 497 police officers a day to these areas as IERU

(Autopsy and Identification Unit) to work with doctors and dentists in performing autopsies and identifying the bodies.

Amidst harsh conditions with water and power outages, the units performed their duties with extreme cautiousness, gently rinsing mud off the bodies with scant amounts of water.

Autopsy and Identification Status (as of June 20, 2011)

Pref.	Item	Remains Taken In (Bodies)	Autopsies (Bodies)	Persons Identified (Bodies)	Remains Delivered (Bodies)	
						Delivery to Family (Bodies)
Iwate Prefecture		4,549	4,549(100)	3,783(83.2)	4,502(99.0)	3,624(79.7)
Miyagi Prefecture		9,251	9,251(100)	8,306(89.8)	9,235(99.8)	7,708(83.3)
Fukushima Prefecture		1,597	1,597(100)	1,487(93.1)	1,595(99.9)	1,215(76.1)
Total		15,397	15,397(100)	13,576(88.2)	15,332(99.6)	12,547(81.5)

Notes:

1) Figures in parentheses represent the percentage (%) of the remains taken in.

2) Other than those delivered to the family, "Remains Delivered" includes body remains delivered to municipali

2) Various Efforts in Identification

Identifying bodies was rough going. Positive body identification normally requires an item in the person's belongings or the location where the body was discovered that confirms the individual's name and address, direct identification by a family member, or more involved methods. With this earthquake, however, remains were often taken by the tsunami and discovered in locations far removed from their places of residence or work, and many were separated from any identifying items. Also, many of the families were suffering themselves, making it difficult for them to identify the bodies.

In efforts to identify even just one more person, police therefore took various approaches, including:

- Posting pictures of the bodies with

information on their clothing, sex, and physical features in morgues and on prefectural police websites

- During autopsies of all remains, thorough documentation of fingerprints, palm prints, extracted DNA profiling material, and dental imprints, in preparation for later identification
- Taking DNA samples from families of missing persons for use in methods similar to parental testing and with cooperation from the Japanese Red Cross, obtaining blood samples previously donated by missing persons (for identification purposes).

2. Response to Nuclear Plant Disaster

(1) Evacuation Guidance and Transport of Evacuees with Limited Mobility

As soon as the evacuation directive was issued, police guided evacuation of residents

and directed traffic in the vicinity of the Fukushima I and II nuclear power plants.

After the evacuation directive was issued for the 20-kilometer radius surrounding the Fukushima I Nuclear Power Plant, police continued guiding resident evacuation with assistance from units specializing in radiation measurements. They also transported inpatients and others within the exclusion zone who could not evacuate of their own volition to shelters and hospitals.

(2) Guards, Patrols, and Searches Within the 20-km Radius

The police established checkpoints on major roads around the perimeter of the 20-km radius around Fukushima I and also



Searches within the 20-km Radius

3) Setting No-Entry Zone Boundaries and Associated Activity

Even after the no-entry zone and planned evacuation zone boundaries were set, the police continued their checkpoints, lookouts and patrolling and search duties. They also briefly entered the no-entry zone to guide buses for loading residents and other support functions. From June 2, they organized a special patrol force of roughly 300 to reinforce lookouts and patrols in the planned evacuation zone and other hazardous areas.

guarded and patrolled the area between the 10-km and 20-km radii.

Fukushima prefectural police conducted a joint search with a special contingent from Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) between the 10-km and 20-km radii around Fukushima I from April 7, 2011, and a solo search inside the 10-km radius from April 14. They had recovered a total of 355 remains as of June 20. Conditions were severe, particularly within 10-km of the plant. At first, no debris had been removed from roads, and police had to remove the debris by hand and push through to conduct searches. Later, police worked with local private operators to remove debris with heavy machinery and complete searches.



3. Traffic Measures

(1) Securing Emergency Traffic Routes

On March 12, 2011, the day after the earthquake, police designated the Tohoku Expressway, Joban Expressway, and sections of the Ban'etsu Expressway as emergency traffic routes to ensure the passage of vehicles needed for lifesaving and transport of emergency supplies. Meanwhile, from March 16-22 police worked to minimize the impact of traffic restrictions on civilian life by gradually reducing the areas with traffic restrictions depending on the state of repair of highways and other factors. All traffic restrictions were lifted for major highways on March 24.

Summarized timeline of expansion for issuance of emergency vehicle seals

3/12	Vehicles transporting medicine and medical equipment
3/13	Vehicles transporting food, household goods, and fuel Vehicles transporting doctors and dentists Vehicles transporting construction machinery
3/14	Express buses
3/15	Vehicles transporting livestock feed
3/16	Seals for tankers issued at highway interchanges
3/22	Larger vehicles allowed passage without authorized seals
3/24	Issuance ends

(2) Issuing Seals for Authorized Emergency Vehicles

Along with designating emergency traffic routes, police aimed to issue appropriate authorized emergency vehicle seals needed for passage. At first, police gave priority to seals for vehicles helping to transport disaster emergency measures for the public sector and emergency supplies for the government, as well as vehicles transporting food, medicine, fuel and other essentials. Based on the state of road repair and affected areas, issuance was flexibly expanded. Police worked to expedite issuance by simplifying the process; for tankers in particular, seals were issued at highway interchanges in addition to police stations. A total of 163,208 seals were issued by March 24, 2011, when traffic restrictions were completely lifted.

(3) Support for Vehicle Parking Certification Procedures

With so many victims losing their homes and vehicles, police simplified the application procedure for vehicle parking certificates to the extent possible to issue certificates quickly. Police simplified the application process and skipped site inspection for parking spaces.

(4) Support for Driver's License Procedures

1) Extensions for Validity Periods

Measures were taken to extend the validity period for victims whose driving licenses expired after the date of the earthquake.

2) Promoting Reissuance

As licenses are necessary for operating vehicles and useful as identification, license renewal services resumed in all prefectures by April 3, 2011 thanks to hard work in restoring services.

(5) Handling Out-of-Order Traffic Lights

Many traffic lights went out of order along with planned power outages. Police officers were therefore stationed at major intersections with malfunctioning signals to conduct traffic.

4. Ensuring Safety and Security in Affected Areas

(1) Measures against Opportunist Crimes

1) Deployment of Community Police Special Dispatch Units and Mobile Investigation Special Dispatch Units

To deter illegal activity in affected areas and conduct accurate initial investigations when crimes did occur, Community Police Special Dispatch Units and Mobile Investigation Special Dispatch Units were formed and dispatched to Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectural police. Community Police Special Dispatch Units consisted of officers in police cars (up to 449 officers in 210 vehicles a day), and Mobile Investigation Special Dispatch Units consisted of officers in unmarked police cars (up to 76 officers in 19 vehicles a day).

2) Strengthening Security Measures for Closed Facilities

As there were instances where cash and valuables were stolen from banks, safes, and ATMs in convenience stores and other locations, the NPA requested banks and other facilities to strengthen security measures by taking measures such as

enhancing management and promptly recovering cash for their facilities closed due to the earthquake.

3) Measures against Opportunist Fraudulent Business and Donation Scams

Police received reports of fraudulent business and donation scams trying to capitalize on the earthquake and incidents at the nuclear plants. Upon gathering relevant information and sharing it with relevant agencies and groups to crack down hard on such activity, police launched publicity enlightenment activities utilizing public service announcements and the NPA website, and provided financial institutions with information to freeze accounts being used for criminal activity.

4) Excluding Organized Crime from Recovery and Reconstruction Projects

In order to prevent involvement of organized crime groups in recovery and reconstruction projects, police strengthened ties with relevant agencies and groups by requesting industry groups in construction and waste disposal to write stipulations into their contracts to exclude crime organization involvement.

5) Protecting Against Groundless Rumors

Groundless rumors stirred up fierce anxieties in victims in the affected areas and across the nation. Police distributed leaflets as part of a widespread call for public attention not to be misled by such rumors.

Case: A 50-year-old self-employed man was selling medication without permission, claiming the medication could force the body to excrete radioactive materials that have been absorbed into the body. In April 2011, the MPD arrested two for violating the

Pharmaceutical Affairs Act on unauthorized sale of medication.

Case: An unemployed man (39) pretending to be a disaster victim posted on an online forum that he was vacationing in the affected area when the earthquake hit and wanted help with transportation costs. He made the victim who had seen the post and had contacted him transfer 120,000 yen in cash into the man's bank account. In April 2011, Nagano police arrested the man for fraud.

(2) Victim Support

1) Visiting Shelters and Establishing Mobile Police Boxes



Female officer in action

Squads mainly comprised of female officers visited evacuation shelters to counsel with victims and offer other forms of victim support. The Imperial Guard Headquarters and 16 prefectural police sent female police officers for this task, with 115 officers a day in service at the peak. Some police stations in the affected areas also established mobile police boxes (*Ido Koban*) to tour all the shelters in their jurisdiction. These mobile police boxes accepted lost property and damage reports, distributed flyers providing information on crime prevention, and counseled with and handled various requests from victims.

Case: While visiting a shelter, a female officer sat down with victims to provide not only consultations regarding police matters such as

patrol requests but also to lend an earnest ear to serious consultations from victims in severe situations. "I lost everything. My house, my family, my fields—everything," said one victim. "There's no hope for me. I have no money to live off of," said another. The officer tried to relieve their anxieties by introducing a variety of support systems and programs. "I'm grateful for you just listening to my story. It gives me hope to keep going." "Seeing police officers around makes me feel safe." "Please come again." These were some of the comments received from victims.

2) Supporting Volunteer Crime Patrols

Crime patrols and other volunteer crime prevention were active in the affected areas. The police supported groups and individuals by taking measures such as jointly forming patrols and volunteering for crime prevention activities. They ensured that the groups and individuals going on joint patrols with victims and volunteering to help had enough vests, armbands, flashlights and other equipment.



Volunteer crime patrols in action

(3) Counseling Concerning Missing Persons

Prefectural police in Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima established Missing Person Hotlines to counsel people from around the country asking about missing relatives. They posted hotline phone numbers on websites, newspapers, and other media, and word spread. Police helped people confirm that their relatives were safe by comparing information on the missing people given over the hotline to information from people taking refuge in the shelters.



Operators at work at a Missing Person Hotline

5. Role of Police Telecommunications

With telecommunications lines down and overloaded mobile phone lines, the various types of independently developed and maintained police radio channels and other police communications were an indispensable means of gathering and communicating information on the disaster situation, rescues and other issues. Police were working on communication from the time the earthquake first struck. Power for radio relay stations was secured with emergency generators, even going as far as to transport fuel on foot to refill generators for relay stations near mountaintops to keep police communication facilities working.



Transporting fuel to radio relay stations

6. Situation of Damage to Police Forces and Facilities

(1) Officers who died on duty

Of the officers hit by the Great East Japan Earthquake while on duty, 25 officers were confirmed dead, and five remained missing as of June 20, 2011. The majority of these were guiding tsunami evacuations, including some who rushed to the scene despite being off duty that day.



The damaged Takata Police Box, Ofunato Police Station,
Iwate Prefecture

Case: The Takata Police Box, the Ofunato Police Station, lay in the heart of Rikuzentakata, Iwate. In February 2011, the box was selected as an "Outstanding Police Box" for the first time by the Iwate prefectural police for dramatically reducing crime through reinforced street patrols and other efforts. The chief leading the police box to its award, who was preparing to retire at the end of that month, was on duty when the earthquake and

tsunami hit, and died in the line of duty. Receiving reports that the tsunami had overflowed the harbor floodgates from one of his officers, the chief gave the order to evacuate the townspeople, adding that "here, my real job begins." He stayed on in the box alone to man the radio and was swept up in the tsunami.



The damaged Yuriage Residential Police Box, Iwanuma
Police Station, Miyagi Prefecture

(2) Situation of Damage to Police Facilities and Vehicles

As the Fukushima Prefectural Police Headquarters was damaged in the earthquake, disaster security headquarters functions were transferred to the Fukushima Police Station. The tsunami rendered Kamaishi police station in Iwate, as well as Kesennuma and Minami-Sanriku police

stations in Miyagi unusable, and either fully or partially destroyed numerous police boxes

and residential police boxes. Police vehicles and ships also sustained heavy damage.

Situation of damage to police facilities and vehicles (as of June 20, 2011)

	Iwate Police	Miyagi Police	Fukushima Police	Total
Police Headquarters	0	1	1 and 1 branch	2 and 1 branch
				1 branch rendered unusable
Police Stations	14	24	20 and 4 branches	58 and 4 branches
				3 stations rendered unusable
Police Boxes/ Residential Police Boxes	56	120	57	233
				43 rendered unusable