

TOPICS

Response to the 2024 Noto Peninsula Earthquake

On January 1, 2024 at 4:10 pm, a magnitude 7.6 (provisional figure) earthquake struck the Noto Peninsula in Ishikawa Prefecture, registering an intensity of 7 on the Japanese seismic scale in Shika Town and Wajima City, and upper 6 in Nanao City, Suzu City, Anamizu Town, and Noto Town. This was followed by a series of aftershocks, including a total of 18 quakes with a seismic intensity of 5 lower or higher ^(Note 1). The earthquake also generated a range of cascading hazards, including large-scale landslides and fires. The earthquake caused massive human and property damage, leaving 230 dead, 1,316 injured, 28,885 houses completely or half destroyed, and 96,826 houses partially destroyed ^(Note 2).

(1) Police system

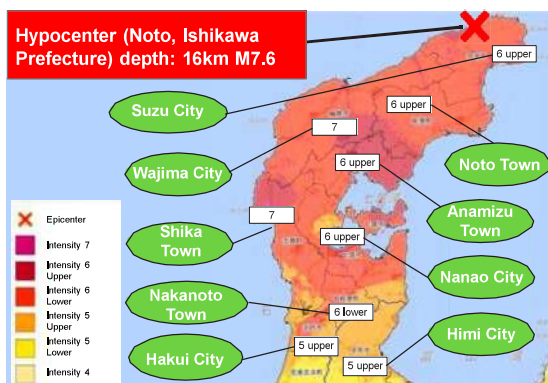
The police established the Emergency Disaster Headquarters, headed by the Chief of Police, inside the Ishikawa Prefectural Police, and dispatched a total of about 114,000 police officers and other personnel, including Disaster Response Units, and 306 police aircraft (helicopters) to the Ishikawa Prefectural Police from around Japan. Despite the harsh cold weather in the middle of winter and other tough conditions, including prolonged water and power outages, the entire police force of Japan made unified efforts, making the most of its collective strengths, to carry out disaster policing activities, including rescuing victims, searching for missing people, collecting information about the damage, taking necessary traffic measures, facilitating emergency communication, and ensuring safety and security in the disaster areas ^(Note 3).

(2) Victim rescue

The Inter-prefectural Emergency Rescue Units (Security Units) and the Emergency Disaster Security Squads dispatched from across Japan joined the Ishikawa Prefectural Police to work in cooperation with the Japan Self-Defense Forces, local governments, fire departments, and DMAT ^(Note 4) to rescue people from collapsed buildings and elsewhere as well as to search for missing people in places stricken by landslides and in regions where wide areas of buildings had burned down.

In the earthquake's immediate aftermath, when it was difficult to travel to the worst-affected regions such as Suzu City and Wajima City due to landslides and other damage, the police swiftly mobilized teams in the disaster areas while collecting information about passable roads using four-wheel-drive vehicles and other means of transportation. In addition, the Inter-prefectural Emergency Rescue Units (Security Units) were transported via large cargo helicopters with the cooperation of the Japan Self-Defense Forces.

Chart V-1: Seismic intensity distribution in the 2024 Noto Peninsula Earthquake



Note: Created based on Japan Meteorological Agency data



Transportation of teams by the Self-Defense Forces



Searching wide areas where buildings burned down



A rescue dog involved in a search operation

Note 1: As of April 23, 2024.

2: The amounts of human and property damage were sourced from documents issued by the Disaster Management Agency and the Ishikawa Prefectural Government. (All values are as of June 4, 2024. The number of deaths does not include disaster-related deaths.)

3: As of June 4, 2024.

4: DMAT stands for Disaster Medical Assistance Team. This is a medical team composed of doctors, nurses, and other members who have been specially trained to work as front-line staff at disaster sites, etc.

In search operations for missing people in collapsed buildings and elsewhere, the proactive use of rescue dogs resulted in the discovery of victims. In addition, assistance team members saved victims in isolated communities where the roads had been closed to traffic due to landslides and other damage; they did so by descending from helicopters to check the safety of citizens and to hoist those in need of rescue to safety using hoisting rescue equipment ^(Note 1).

As a result of these operations, the police rescued 114 victims ^(Note 2).



Rescue operation using a helicopter

CASE

On January 3, 2024 at around 11 am, the Kanagawa Prefectural Police's Inter-prefectural Emergency Rescue Units began an operation to rescue a resident from a collapsed house in Suzu City, based on a report that the resident was stuck under the collapsed house. The first story of the two-story wooden house had been crushed, while the second story was steeply tilted. Despite the dangerous situation with aftershocks continuing to jolt the region, the man in his 80s, who was trapped in a small gap on the first floor, was rescued safe and sound through their hard work.



A man being rescued from a collapsed house

CASE

On January 12, 2024, the Hyogo Prefectural Police's Aviation Unit and the Miyazaki Prefectural Police's Inter-prefectural Emergency Rescue Units hoisted three residents who had called for help into their helicopter using hoisting rescue equipment after conducting needs hearings with members of a community in Wajima City that had become isolated due to road closures.



A resident being hoisted to a helicopter

CASE

The earthquake left multiple radio-relay stations ^(Note 3) in Ishikawa Prefecture without electricity. Emergency power generators were put to use to provide the facilities with the electricity required to maintain and secure communications essential for police activities, including identifying damage and rescuing victims. From January to February 2024, the roads leading to some radio-relay stations that depended on emergency power generators for electricity remained closed due to damage. Under such circumstances, members of the Ishikawa Prefectural Info-Communications Department, Chubu Regional Police Bureau, and other personnel worked to maintain the functions of police communications facilities by transporting fuel for the emergency power generators by helicopter.



Transporting fuel by helicopter

Note 1: Equipment that transports people and goods up and down a wire using a motorized system fitted outside an aircraft.

2: As of April 26, 2024.

3: Facilities that contain communication relay equipment used for police radio communications. They are often installed on mountains to provide service over a wide area. For more information on the police communications that support police activities, see page 210 (Chapter 7).

(3) Inspection and identification of bodies

Police inspected and identified the bodies of victims and returned to their families or other appropriate people. Up to 96 members of Inter-prefectural Emergency Rescue Units (Criminal Investigation Units) per day were sent to the Ishikawa Prefectural Police from 9 different prefectural police departments, and they worked together with the Ishikawa Prefectural Police to inspect and identify these bodies.

(4) Traffic measures

① Traffic control and guidance

Inter-prefectural Emergency Rescue Units (Traffic Units) and Special Traffic Units dispatched from 38 prefectural police departments worked together with the Ishikawa Prefectural Police to gather information about damaged road surfaces, and police officers provided traffic control and guidance, mainly at major intersections where traffic lights had gone out ^(Note 1).

In response to the damage to major roads leading to Wajima and Suzu, traffic restrictions were imposed on some sections of the Noto-Satoyama Kaidō from January 7 to March 15, 2024 to render the sections exclusive to vehicles involved in disaster recovery and transport of relief supplies, with the aim of ensuring smoother traffic for such purposes. Meanwhile, public relations and awareness-building activities were carried out to encourage people to voluntarily refrain from driving general vehicles on the roads leading to Wajima and Suzu.



Traffic control at an intersection where a traffic light had gone out

② Extension of driver's license validity periods

The disaster caused by the 2024 Noto Peninsula Earthquake was designated as a specific extraordinary disaster ^(Note 2). In response, various measures were taken, including the extension of the period of validity of driver's licenses that would expire on or after January 1, 2024.

In addition, some police stations in Ishikawa Prefecture set up temporary points of contact for applications for reissuance of driver's licenses to accept reissuance applications from victims without identification documents and other people in need.

(5) Ensuring of safety and security in the disaster areas ^(Note 3)

① Increased vigilance and patrolling in the disaster areas

Given that many victims were forced to flee their homes, the Ishikawa Prefectural Police worked to prevent thefts at their residences and other crimes from occurring as well as to ensure safety and security in the disaster areas by working together with Special Automobile Patrol Units ^(Note 4) dispatched from 45 prefectural police departments to carry out vigilance and patrolling activities in the disaster areas and around evacuation centers, mobilizing as many as 500 police officers and 90 police cars per day, while conducting intensive on-site public relations and other activities.



Vigilance and patrolling activities using police cars in the disaster areas

MEMO

Installation of security cameras at evacuation centers, etc.

As part of anti-crime measures in the disaster areas, the police installed 1,006 security cameras not only in evacuation centers but in streets that were empty due to the evacuation of residents and other places in Ishikawa Prefecture, taking into account where crimes occur, demand among victims for security camera installation, and expected anti-crime effects.

Reacting to these initiatives, the disaster survivors made comments such as "I'm glad they installed security cameras" and "It's a relief to have a security camera installed here."



Installation of security cameras

Note 1: This refers to the state in which traffic signals are not functioning.

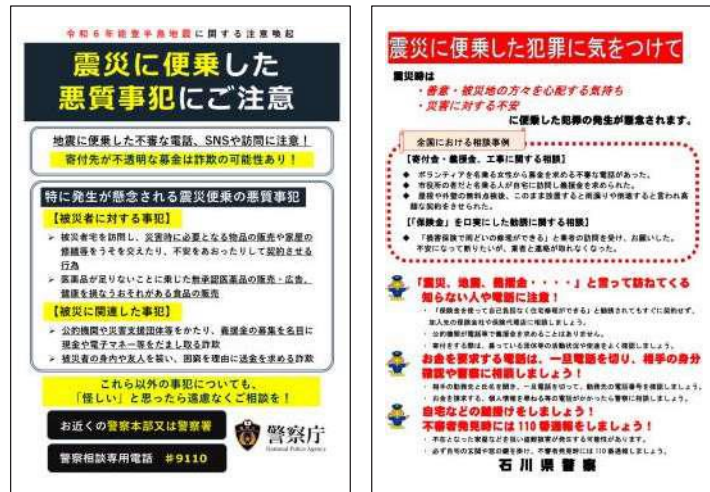
2: "A specific extraordinary disaster" as defined in Article 2-1 of the Act Regarding Special Measures to Weigh the Preservation of Rights and Profits of the Victims of Specified Extraordinary Disasters.

3: As of the end of April 2024.

4: Units formed by local police officers going out in police cars to conduct vigilance, patrolling, and on-site public relations activities, often in disaster areas.

② Measures against malicious offenses taking advantage of the disaster

There have been concerns about the occurrence of fraudulent business practices taking advantage of the earthquake, donation scams, and so forth. The police are alerting people in evacuation centers and other places about such malicious offenses; carrying out public relations and awareness-building activities through government publicity efforts, the website of the National Police Agency (Note 1), social media, and other channels to prevent people from becoming victims; and promoting intensive crackdowns on the perpetrators.



Crime prevention flyers to alert people

③ Provision of counselling and other services at evacuation centers

Special Community Safety Units, comprised mainly of female police officers, were dispatched from 43 prefectural police departments, and they worked together with the Ishikawa Prefectural Police to visit evacuation centers, where they carried out various activities to meet victims' needs—for example, giving anti-crime advice using crime prevention flyers and offering counselling.

Reacting to these activities, disaster survivors made comments such as “Just seeing police officers makes me feel safer” and “Thank you for coming such a long way.”



A female police officer working at an evacuation center

MEMO

Efforts to let victims and other people know about police activities, etc.

The Ishikawa Prefectural Police and other prefectural police departments proactively communicated information about the rescue of victims by the police, vigilance and patrolling conducted in the disaster areas, and other police activities, as well as information contributing to crime prevention, through social media and other channels, while also conducting visits to evacuation centers to ensure that victims and other concerned people received such information, with the goal of meeting victims' needs by taking care of their feelings and helping to resolve their anxieties associated with evacuation. Moreover, the National Police Agency provided images of these police activities conducted in the disaster areas to a broad range of media and distributed the information through the website of the agency and its special disaster information accounts on social media (Note 2) to make the information reach victims and other people more widely.



Public relations on X (formerly Twitter)
(regarding the transport of relief supplies to
the disaster areas)



Public relations on YouTube
(regarding patrolling in the disaster areas)



Flyer-based public relations

Note 1: <https://www.npa.go.jp/bureau/security/biki/disaster.html>

Note 2: https://twitter.com/NPA_saigaiKOH