

Topic I: Police Rescue Operations under Harsh Natural Conditions

(1) Mountain Rescue Operations

I. Mountain Rescue Team Operations

The number of accidents in mountainous areas has been increasing in recent years. The number in 2014 was higher than that in 2005 by 911 (or 65.9%). In the event of mountain-climbing accidents, prefectural police set up a mountain rescue team to conduct emergency search and rescue of people in distress in the mountains. The police also establish temporary security outposts as the headquarters for rescue operations, provide mountain climbing instructions to climbers while patrolling the mountains, and conduct safety checks of trails and surveys of potentially dangerous areas.

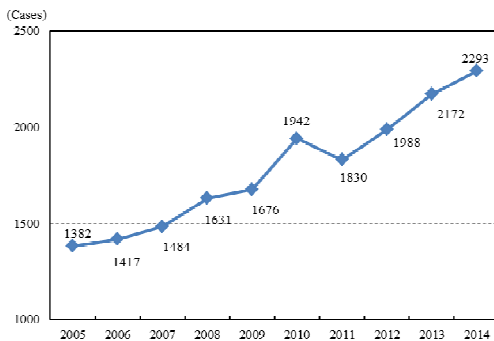


Drills conducted by mountain rescue team members

Column: Climbing Notifications

Climbing Notifications, also called climbing planning sheets or climber cards, record information such as the names and climbing routes of climbers. It is recommended that every climber/party submits a notification to the relevant local government or police in advance, so that they can promptly respond to emergencies in the mountains. Climbers can submit notifications directly to the local government or police, or can put them in a post box placed at the trailhead of a mountain or in mountain lodges. The police have been collaborating with other agencies concerned in encouraging climbers to submit notifications partly because the preparation of a notification gives climbers an opportunity to review the safety of their climbing plans. Some local governments require climbers to submit notifications pursuant to ordinances.

Chart I-1 Number of mountain accidents per year (2005 - 2014)



II. Rescue Equipment and Regular Search-and-Rescue Drills

The police possess mountain rescue vehicles and snow vehicles utilized by rescue teams to access rescue sites, as well as stretchers and rescue slings for transporting victims. With the aim of ensuring swift and efficient rescue operations by using these vehicles and equipment, mountain rescue teams conduct practical drills based on actual accidents in the past.

Notification form sample

(2) Water Rescue Operations

Prefectural police have supplied a total of approximately 160 police boats to police stations responsible for the safety and security of major ports, remote islands and rivers, and these boats have been used for water rescue operations conducted in cooperation with the Japan Coast Guard, as well as for patrols and crime control activities.



Police boats

Case: In November 2014, waves striking one side of a fishing boat caused it to capsize on the coast of Kochi Prefecture. The captain, 63, and two other crew members were thrown overboard. At the request of Kochi Coast Guard Office, the Kochi Prefectural Police dispatched the police boat "Ootosa" to the rescue site. At that time, a gale warning had been issued for the marine areas which included the rescue site, and the waves were as high as 2 meters. The police boat, in cooperation with a rescue helicopter that was sent to the site by the prefectural government, rescued the three victims by the use of lifebuoys and slings.



Police boat rescue operation

(3) Operations of Police Units during Large-Scale Disasters

I. Disaster Relief Operations of Police Disaster Response Units

When a disaster takes place, mobile police units and additional police officers are dispatched for relief operations by the prefectural police responsible for the safety

and security of the disaster-stricken area (hereinafter, the “police of the affected areas”). Disaster-relief operations include the gathering of information concerning the damage caused by the disaster, the rescue of disaster victims, and the search for missing persons.

In a disaster causing an unexpectedly large amount of damage that makes it difficult for the police of the affected areas to cope with the situation on their own, Police Disaster Dispatch Units¹, as a structure to support disaster security operations, are set up and sent to the afflicted areas.

Case: In August 2014, the city of Hiroshima was struck by a series of large-scale landslides. With the dispatch of Police Disaster Dispatch Units from across the country, the Hiroshima Prefectural Police rescued victims, searched for missing persons, and engaged in around-the-clock disaster security operations in the devastated areas where torrents of mud water left piles of rocks, fallen trees and other debris.



Rescue operation utilizing a police helicopter

1: Disaster Response Units (DRUs) are organized on the basis of Inter-Prefectural Emergency Rescue Units (IERUs) and consist of Readiness Units and Regular Units. Approximately 10,000 officers nationwide belong to Readiness Units and are mobilized immediately following the occurrence of a large disaster. Other officers of DRUs belong to Regular Units which are sent to disaster-stricken areas to engage in a broad range of operations in response to local needs when a prolonged period of time is necessary for these operations.

II. Development of Training Facilities to Improve Police Capabilities to Cope with Disasters

In order to further enhance the capabilities of IERUs and other operation units, there is a necessity to develop facilities that can be used as a training center for officers in preparation for disaster security operations.

Specifically, as IERU members and other police officers need to undertake safe and effective training and drills given in a systematic and step-by-step manner to improve their capabilities to respond to disasters such as landslides due to heavy rains or large-scale earthquakes that are likely to take place in the future in Japan, the police are proceeding with plans to develop training facilities.



Training facilities (Conceptual plan)

Column: The Volcanic Eruption of Mt. Ontake and Ensuing Police Operations

Mt. Ontake, a volcano straddling Nagano and Gifu prefectures, erupted in September 2014 with many climbers falling victim to the disaster. On the steep slopes near the mountaintop where a thick layer of volcanic ash covered the ground and volcanic gases were released, police from the two prefectures rescued and provided relief to victims, with the help of mobile units from the Metropolitan Police Department. The Nagano prefectural police mountain rescue team climbed to the mountaintop and rescued people stranded there. The Gifu prefectural police mountain guard, on patrol near the mountaintop, carried a woman, 39, who was unable to

walk due to a broken leg, out of a mountain lodge and rescued her with a police helicopter.



Gas concentration measurements



Search for victims near the top of Mt. Ontake