

10. INFORMATION

DAMAGE INFORMATION COLLECTED BY THE TOWN HEADQUARTERS

INFORMATION FLOW DURING THE EVENT

22:17	Occurrence of earthquake
:22	Tsunami warning issued by JMA
:30	Confirm Hotel Yoyoso's collapse
:31	Evacuation counsel for tsunami disaster
:35	Request relief activities of Self Defense Forces (SDF)
:50	Set up emergency response headquarters
23:00	Confirm outbreak of fire in Aonae community by fire fighter's wireless
:17	Report on damage in Aonae district from branch of Town Office using wireless
:39	Confirm absence of damage in Okushiri community
:55	Report on safety of residents in Miyazu and Yamasedomari communities from Town Office staff using fire fighter's wireless
00:00	
:08	Confirm absence of damage in Hotokezawa community
:23	Request for dispatch of medical doctors by SDF's helicopter
:38	Report on casualties in Inaho community from Town Office staff
:56	Report on fire in Aonae community
01:00	
:03	Report on relief activities in Tamaura community
:05	Confirm outbreak of 2nd fire in Aonae community
02:00	
:27	Report on devastation of Nonamae community from Town Office staff
03:00	
:06	Report on heavy devastation of Inaho community from Town Office staff
04:00	
:25	Helicopter recognizes flash lights in Horonai community
:49	Report on damage in Tamaura community
05:00	
:40	Confirmation of bodies in Monai community Report on evacuation of residents by fishery boat in Kamuiwaki community
06:00	
:12	Confirm heavy devastation in Hatsumatsumae community

The extent to which an emergency response headquarters can rapidly and accurately collect information on disaster stricken areas amid the confusion following an earthquake is a vital factor in carrying out appropriate emergency measures. The diagram at left is a record of how damage information from the affected areas was transmitted to the Okushiri Town Headquarters for the 8 hours from the disaster initiation to 06:00 the next morning.

Since the damage in the Okushiri community where the Town Office is located was relatively light, most of the Town Office staff were able to gather there by 22:25, seven minutes after the shock. The first damage information received by the Office was the news of a landslide which struck Hotel Yoyoso. As the hotel is located very near the Town Office, this information was provided by the staff members on their way to the Office. Later at 22:31, according to the tsunami warning on TV, the evacuation counsel was raised through emergency wireless. The town headquarters was set up at 22:50. However, no damage or casualty reports were received from any locality before 23:00, 45 minutes after the occurrence, when a fire outbreak in the Aonae community was confirmed with a wireless message from the Aonae branch of the fire station as the second damage information. A staff member of the Aonae branch of the Town Office reported on the damage, the tsunami at 23:17, as well as various other information including the fire spread and evacuation which was transmitted every 20–30 minutes throughout the night.

A Town Office staff member who lives in the northeastern section, first attempted to reach the Town Office but gave up when he found the roads unpassable. He then set out alone to the affected area where he assisted in rescue operations and reported all collected information to the headquarters using the fire fighter's wireless. As a result, much valuable information was obtained.

Absolutely no information was received regarding the west coast that had been struck by 30 m high tsunami and isolated from other areas because of the destruction of roads. The first report on this area was obtained by a helicopter which had been continuing reconnaissance flights. The helicopter recognized flash signals by electric lights in the Horonai community, where the existence of survivors was thus identified. This occurred at 04:25 on 13 July, 6 hours and 8 minutes after the quake.

Examining the abovementioned process of gathering damage information in Okushiri Town, it is clear that very little information can be expected when telephone lines are severed. This lack of information was due to two major reasons; the disaster occurred at night and there was poor accessibility to affected areas. As is evident by the case of the Off-Kushiro Earthquake in January 1993 when the first report was received 42 minutes after the event, a local headquarters would probably not receive any information for at least 30–40 minutes following the quake. As a lesson learnt from the abovementioned experiences of Okushiri island, the efforts of one staff member in the northeastern community should be highlighted. Not all staff members should gather at the headquarters. Some members should remain in their own communities to collect information from the affected areas in their vicinity. This would lead to more effective results in emergency response management.