

Disaster Management Education in Kamaishi



The people evacuating from tsunami on 11th March, 2011



Evacuation training by students as a part of disaster management education

In Kamaishi City, Iwate Prefecture, where more than 1,000 people died or were left missing due to the tsunami caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake, 2,911 elementary and junior high school students escaped the tsunami. The tidal waves claimed the lives of five children out of those who were absent from school on that day or who had already gone home, but nearly all of the schoolchildren in the city escaped the disaster by evacuating from their schools.

Since 2004, the Board of Education of Kamaishi City has tried to instill disaster

awareness among teachers and schoolchildren under the advice of Professor Toshitaka Katada of Gunma University. However, as the evacuation rate of schoolchildren was less than 10% at the time of the 2006 earthquake off the Kuril Islands, each elementary and junior high school reviewed its plan to evacuate children while they are on their way to or from school, and decided to allocate about 10 hours a year for disaster management education, including lessons to learn of the danger of tsunami. In March 2010, a manual for tsunami disaster prevention, written by teachers, was completed and incorporated into disaster management education at all 14 of the city's elementary and junior high schools. In disaster management education, Professor Katada strongly emphasized three principles of tsunami evacuation: "Don't believe in preconceived ideas," "Do everything you can" and "Take the leadership in evacuation."

These lessons bore fruit. After the earthquake, the students of Kamaishi Higashi Junior High School ran to an evacuation site, shouting "a tsunami is coming!" At the neighboring Unosumai Elementary School, pupils gathered on the third floor as the school building itself was unharmed and the area was outside a presumed flooding zone. However, after seeing junior high school students fleeing, teachers decided to evacuate the children from the school. In all, approximately 600 students fled to a group home for the elderly which was about 700 meters away, and had been designated as an evacuation center. After receiving advice from a local resident who saw the cliff behind the group home collapsing, the students, sensing the danger, ran up to a nursing care facility on higher ground about 500 meters from the group home while junior high school students held hands with elementary school students. Seeing the force of the tsunami, the children fled further uphill. The junior high school students also helped kindergarten children and elderly people at the nursing care facility to escape. The tsunami reached the ground right in front of the facility.

All children were safe at Kamaishi Elementary School, situated in the city, where more than 90% of the pupils had gone home. A child who was at home with his grandmother helped her escape, while children who were in the park designated as an evacuation destination fled to higher ground after seeing the force of tsunami. Thus, Professor Katada's three principles were practiced by the children.

Kamaishi City has been receiving inquiries from many municipalities across Japan, which hope to take advantage of the city's experience in their disaster management education.