

Japan Session

Theme

Administrative Counseling in
the Great East Japan Earthquake

Japan Session Administrative Counseling in the Great East Japan Earthquake



In this session, two administrative counselors and staff of the administrative counseling division of Tohoku Regional Bureau of MIC will hold a discussion on “Administrative Counseling in the Great East Japan Earthquake”.



Noboru TANI: First of all, let me introduce myself. My name is Noboru Tani and I am President of The National Federation of Administrative Counselors’ Associations of Japan which comprises 5,000 administrative counselors.



Isao SATO: I am Isao Sato, an administrative counselor from Iwate Prefecture. Iwate was heavily damaged by a powerful tsunami wave at the time of the Earthquake. I am President of the Administrative Counselors’ Association of Iwate Prefecture.



Toru SASAKI: I am Toru Sasaki. I am a Manager of the Administrative Counseling Division of the Tohoku Regional Administrative Evaluation Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

PHOTOS OF DAMAGES
震災被害の状況



OTSUCHI, IWATE 岩手県大槌町

TANI: The earthquake which hit the Tohoku area on March 11th this year caused severe damage to our country. Even though already 9 months has passed, those pictures vividly recall the fear and anxiety we experienced at the time of the Earthquake and Tsunami. It was a truly terrible earthquake and tsunami. Especially the tsunami when it hit the Tohoku coast, causing widespread devastation. I have heard that bits of the coast-line literally dropped into the sea and disappeared. Over 15 thousand people lost their lives. Many more lost their homes and workplaces, and many of them are still having to endure uncomfortable living conditions in shelters or temporary housing.

After the earthquake came the nuclear accident in the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant complex. In Tohoku and the surrounding area the lives of many were blighted by worrying rumors of the risk of radiation and by lack of electric power.

SASAKI: I have some data on the quake and the damage caused. The quake measured 9.0 on the Richter scale. It was the largest earthquake ever to have hit Japan. As for human casualties, 15,838 people died, 5,950 were injured and 3,647 are still missing. Most of the dead and missing are concentrated in 3 prefectures, Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima.

Regarding damage to residential buildings, 319,192 houses were either completely or half-destroyed, with again the bulk of the damage occurring in the 3 prefectures already mentioned. As of mid-November, there are some 330,000 people still being forced to live in uncomfortable emergency accommodation.

The government's current estimate of the economic damage is from 16 trillion to 25 trillion yen. It is a staggering figure, but this estimate doesn't include damages incurred by planned power outages and meltdowns of the nuclear power plant. The final toll will be even greater when all those damages have been taken into account.

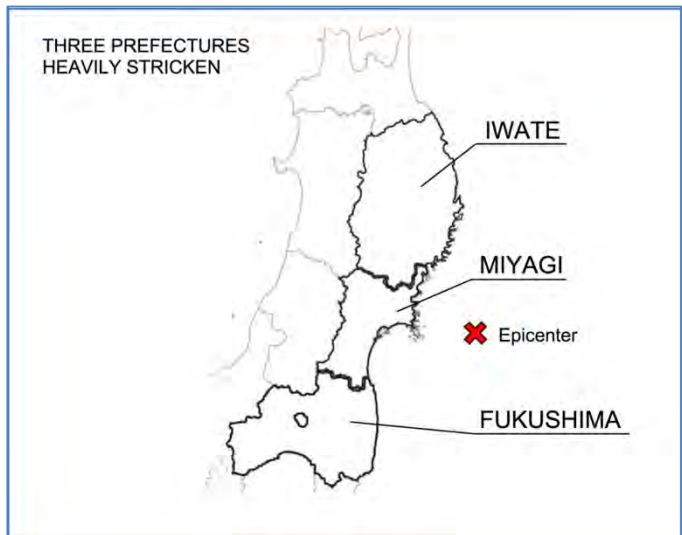
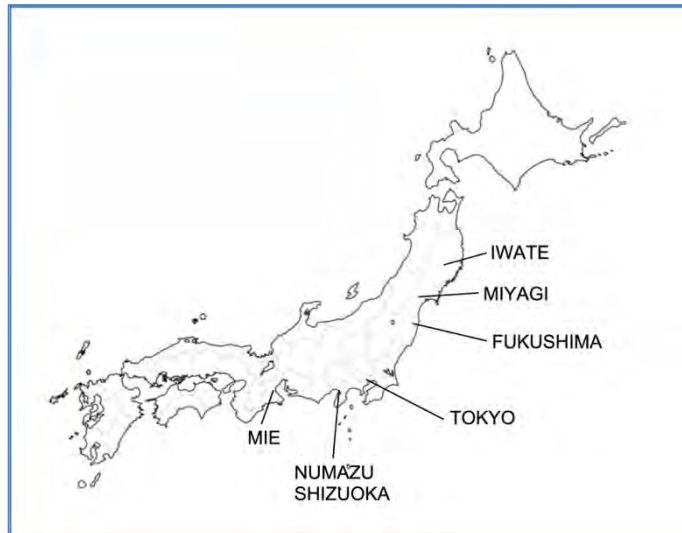
TANI: When the quake struck both of you were in the worst-hit area, weren't you? Mr. Sato was in Iwate and Mr. Sasaki was in Miyagi.

SASAKI: Yes, I was in the MIC office in Sendai, the capital of Miyagi Prefecture. It was Friday afternoon. Immediately after the earthquake, all the staff had to be evacuated from the office building because there was a danger it might collapse and it was then sealed off. Crucial services such as electricity, gas, water and communications stopped. We couldn't do anything on 11th and 12th March.

From Sunday 13th, communications partially recovered and the restriction on entering our building was lifted, so we went back to the office and started checking whether our administrative counselor personnel were safe.

Gradually, communications recovered. We conducted some counseling sessions by phone-link to victims, even though a number of staff of MIC had themselves been affected by the quake. From Monday 14th, we started to receive administrative counseling calls during the daytime, including Saturday and Sunday.

SATO : I was attending a meeting in the inland city Morioka, the capital of Iwate prefecture. After a terrible and long earthquake, I was wondering what I should do.



CASUALTIES (死傷者数)

	TOTAL 合計	IWATE 岩手 a	MIYAGI 宮城 a	FUKUSHIMA 福島 c	a+b+c 三県計	a+b+c /TOTAL
DEATH 死者	15,840	4,665	9,504	1,605	15,774	99.6%
MISSING 行方不明	3,611	1,413	1,973	221	3,607	99.9%
INURED 負傷者	5,950	188	4,013	241	4,442	74.7%

Source: National Police Agency, As of Nov. 25, 2011
警察庁発表 平成23年11月25日現在

In Iwate, the most of main roads near coastline are usually closed to traffic when a tsunami warning is issued. All branch roads access to those main road are also shut off. On the day of the quake, somehow I managed to drive along the Sanriku coast back home to Otsuchi where my wife was waiting for me. In an emergency your initial decision is the most crucial and it needs to be made promptly. I decided to take a narrow mountain pass road. As it was the beginning of March, there was still a lot of snow on the road as well as fallen stones, making it difficult to drive.

DAMAGED RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS (住家被害)

	TOTAL 合計	IWATE 岩手 a	MIYAGI 宮城 a	FUKUSHIMA 福島 c	a+b+c 三県計	a+b+c /TOTAL
COMPLETELY DESTROYED 全壊	121,656	20,184	78,454	18,398	117,036	96.2%
HALFLY DESTROYED 半壊	197,536	4,551	100,606	57,117	162,274	82.1%
PARTLY DAMAGED 一部損壊	613,390	7,291	190,869	132,467	330,627	53.9%

Source: National Police Agency, As of Nov. 25, 2011
警察庁発表 平成23年11月25日現在

My decision to take mountain pass might be the reason why I wasn't involved in the tsunami and fire as a result.

It was about 3 pm when I left Morioka which is some 100km from Otsuchi and it was about 8 pm when I finally got home. It was a very cold night and all we could do was spend the night with a blanket around us, having no electricity or water.

DAMAGE IN STOCKS (Estimation) (施設等に関する損害額推計)

BUILDINGS 建築物等	10.4 trillion yen
LIFELINES ライフライン	1.3 trillion yen
PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE 社会基盤施設	2.2 trillion yen
INFRASTRUCTURE FOR PRIMARY INDUSTRY 農林水産関係	1.9 trillion yen
OTHERS その他	1.1 trillion yen
TOTAL 合計	16.9 trillion yen

Source: Cabinet Office, Jun. 24, 2011
内閣府発表 平成23年6月24日



TANI: Could you really get back home that day in five hours? It was reported that most of Otsuchi Town was devastated by the tsunami. Furthermore there was a terrible fire when a gasoline station blew up. The mayor was killed in the tsunami, wasn't he? How come you could avoid both the powerful tsunami and the fire?

SATO: Fortunately, the tsunami stopped just front of my house. My wife and I were both so relieved when I finally made it home. As for the fire and explosion, I was unaware of them because they happened while I was still driving over the mountain. But as sparks had settled in the mountain, for a while fires were breaking out in many places.

Due to having no electricity we were in utter darkness and it was extremely cold. The power-down continued for a while. Thankfully, we could use gas after the quake because my household uses cylinders of propane gas.

There was no road access to other towns from Otsuchi because all the roads along the coastline were cut off except the narrow mountain road which I had driven down the day of the quake. Otsuchi was a virtually isolated island.

Even if the roads had been connected, I couldn't get out of the town as I was almost out of gasoline due to the long drive home on March 11th, and it was hard to get supplies as you know. I used a bicycle to get around the town which was a sea of rubble. While riding the bicycle I got a chip of rubble in my ear. That caused otitis media and I had to go to hospital for a month.

Fudai Town, one of my work bases, is about 100 km north of Otsuchi. I am an

SERVICE CENTER FOR ADMINISTRATIVE
COUNSELING OF TOLL-FREE NUMBER (IN MIYAGI)
フリーダイヤルによる行政相談受付（東北管区）



administrative counselor and a local welfare commissioner there. I was worried about the people of Fudai as I couldn't reach them.

It was impossible to use normal tools of communications such as a house phone or mobile phone. In such conditions, the car radio and any battery-operated radio were really useful for obtaining information. I recommend everyone to equip themselves with such a radio in case of disaster.

SPECIAL COUNTER FOR ADMINISTRATIVE
COUNSELING SET UP IN SUFFERED AREA
被災者支援特別相談所



MINAMISOMA, FUKUSHIMA 福島県南相馬市

TANI: I respect you for your attitude in such a critical situation. What about you, Mr. Sasaki?

SASAKI: As normal office function resumed in Sendai, we made every effort to run the administrative counseling service in order to meet the needs of the people in the affected area. First of all, we started a toll-free telephone

counseling service from March 23rd, having had to wait for the reinstallation of the telephone line. In the meantime, we traveled around the affected area and met local chief executives to get information about their primary needs.

Then, from March 28th, we began operating special administrative counseling counters on visits to refugee camps or other such places in the cities and towns affected by the quake and tsunami, with the assistance of staff from the main office of MIC and other local offices. At those counseling counters, we received complaints and requests, helped as much as possible by counselors from other ministries and administrative agencies.

As Mr. Sato has already said, most of the roads and public transport system including train and bus services having broken down in the affected areas, we had to borrow special buses in order to be able to run the counseling counters with the help of counselors from other ministries and administrative agencies.

Many administrative counselors from the local neighborhood joined in with these counseling services, even though themselves victims of the disaster. The counseling

counters opened despite lack of fuel and other supplies, never mind that there was a shortage of food and things to drink during those days.

We made an information brochure about our counseling service, including advice to victims for administrative counselors to distribute to the people.

AN ADMINISTRATIVE COUNSELOR
IN A REFUGEE' S CAMP
避難所で活動する行政相談委員



OFUNATO, IWATE on Mar.28
岩手県大船渡市 3月28日

SATO: It was almost impossible to browse a website in the affected area, although we began to get newspapers again from the beginning of April. In such a situation, the most useful means of obtaining information regarding the various measures being provided by the government and other authorities were leaflets and wall news-sheets displayed in the refugee camps and emergency shelters.

TANI: This picture (upper) was taken by a staff of MIC, wasn't it? One of my administrative counselor colleagues opened the counseling counter at the shelter in Ofunato City in Iwate which was particularly badly hit by the tsunami.

SATO: Yes, I also met him and was told that he had launched straight into his administrative counseling activity on his own initiative in a refugee camp as of March 13th. I visited that camp

myself. The camp was in a very cold school gymnastics hall and I hardly know how to describe the misery of those marooned there with a shortage of heaters and only just enough food.

I was strongly impressed by this administrative counselor's dedication to cheering up the refugees of disaster in such circumstances.

TANI: Besides him, many administrative counselors received complaints in the emergency shelters despite even though themselves suffering as a result of the quake. In fact, people were very needy at that time and bombarded the administrative counselors with requests for information.

How many complaints and requests did MIC receive in total, related to the Great East Japan Earthquake?

SASAKI: We dealt with in all 25,361 cases throughout northern Japan, from 11th March to the end of November.

TANI: Out of those, how many cases were filed through the toll-free telephone counseling service you mentioned earlier?



SASAKI: The total number had reached 12,017 by the end of August. It included cases opened in Tohoku as well as other areas. During the earlier period, other branch offices outside of Tohoku area, such as Hokkaido and Kanto had also provided this free service. At the Tohoku Regional Bureau we are still providing the service.

80% of those case-files are received in the March to May period. At the same time we received 7,365 complaints and requests at the 114 special administrative counseling counters set up on a temporary basis in the emergency shelters and camps.

Let me give some examples of the cases received by administrative counseling service. Most of them concerned a refugee camp or a house and included how to dispose of tsunami debris and rubble.





For example, look at this picture (upper). A big fishing boat had wrecked a family's house. In this case, we contacted the relevant agency and got it removed.

In addition, there were also complaints about the procedure for obtaining a Damage Certificate which required the victim to apply for certain official dispensations, about the procedure relating to the vehicle registration and a lot of complaints and requests relating to radioactive contamination due to the accident at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant.

TANI: It might be difficult for foreign guests to understand the vehicle registration issue. Could you explain a bit more about that?

SASAKI: In Japan there is a regulation which requires the registration of every vehicle whereby vehicle tax payment and other burdens come into force. Many people suffered their cars being crushed or washed away by the quake and tsunami and needed their vehicle registration terminating. They were required to go to the government agency in the prefectural capital which tended to be far from the coast. Also they needed to submit various documentation, including the vehicle registration certification and the license plates attached to front and rear of the car.

TANI: Wasn't it impossible and rather unkind to people to expect them to collect their number plates from their car which had been washed away by the tsunami?

SASAKI: Yes, of course. Many of the roads were cut off and it was very difficult to get to a city further inland. Therefore quite a number of people brought license plates which they had just about managed to retrieve from their car in the rubble on the seashore to one of the special administrative counseling counters set up in the refugee camps.

TANI: We administrative counselors all reported similar cases, didn't we?

SASAKI: Yes, it was much the same everywhere, we received similar complaints through individual administrative counselors and the toll-free telephone counseling service. Hence we managed to prevail upon the Ministry concerned and invited its officials to our special administrative counseling counters in the refugee camps to accomplish those procedures on the spot. The number of cases relating to the vehicle de-registration issue reached to more than 600, proving clearly that those procedures constituted an acute need for those in the affected areas.



TANI: Judging from today's conversations so far, I can see that the activity of administrative counselors in this great earthquake disaster was quite different from usual circumstances. I would like to talk about some of the typical activity in which we were involved.

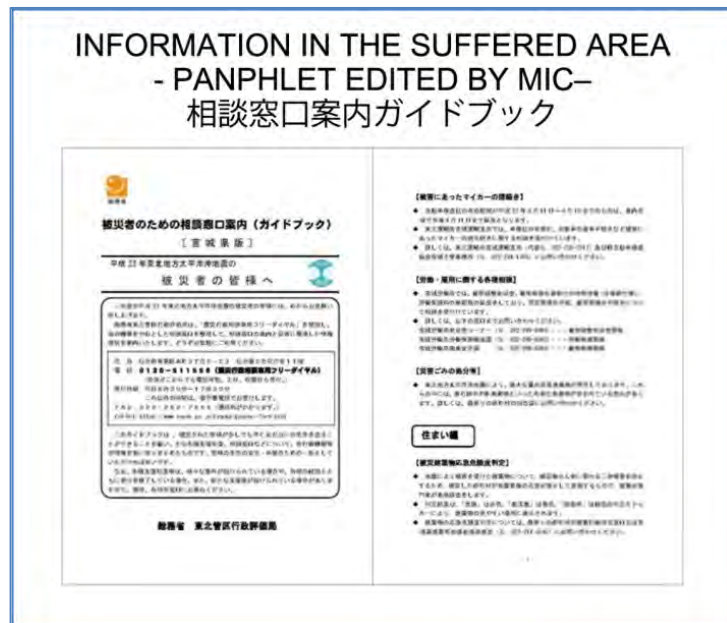


Firstly, there were a lot of people who had to be evacuated away from their hometown where they had been residing for a long time. Those evacuees temporarily spread all over the country and visited nearby administrative counseling windows in order to make complaints and requests. I myself live in Mie Prefecture which is quite a way away from the Tohoku area but administrative counselors in Mie, of which I was one, might receive complaints and requests from those evacuees. On the other hand, most of various supporting measures were being provided by the cities and municipalities in the Tohoku area where the evacuees originally lived. The meant that any administrative counselor

anywhere might have to deal with complaints and requests about an area with which he or she was unfamiliar. We had to do our best to assist people who wanted information regarding their hometown and wanted to make a complaint to the local authority in their hometown. It was not easy to deal with and I had to go to staff of MIC for help.

Secondly, what made matters worse, local authorities in the affected areas were terribly confused by the strain of

trying to perform their normal official functions after the earthquake which in some cases proved impossible. Some local authorities had to install their offices in refugee camps.



SASAKI: We made some leaflets (right) with a list of useful contacts for the benefit of people needing assistance from the various governments and agencies, and distributed them in the refugee camp. It was quite difficult to disseminate this information to all the people especially those in refugee camp, nevertheless our leaflets were of great help.

TANI: In addition, many administrative counselors were themselves victims of this dreadful disaster as was Mr. Sato. Sadly, some administrative counselors lost their precious lives. Needless to say, this affected our activity as administrative counselors.

As President of the National Federation of Administrative Counselors' Associations, I think it is vitally necessary to increase cooperation between all counselors throughout the country, in order to ensure a good quality of service even in these dire circumstances. Each administrative counselor's appointment

was scheduled for renewal last April. And as 2011 is the 50th anniversary of the administrative counselors' system, each prefectural Administrative Counselors' Association was planning a ceremony in celebration of this important milestone.

So we requested donations from the public to enable administrative counselors affected by the disaster to enjoy a get-together. Approximately 4.5 million yen was raised and was distributed to the prefectural Administrative Counselors' Association in the relevant areas.

SATO: I can tell you that our Iwate Prefectural Administrative Counselors' Association was very grateful to receive such a donation.

Japan Session

TANI: In addition to the donations, we distributed materials such as a flag to place on the administrative counseling counter. I think this was well-received.

SASAKI: In my jurisdiction, Miyagi Prefecture, a Chinese lady who is a naturalized Japanese subject has become an administrative counselor. Given the increase in the numbers of foreign residents in Japan, the MIC had considered her commission prior to the quake, and appointed her as an administrative counselor last April. She was very helpful to the refugees who were foreign, including acting as interpreter for those who were Chinese, and provided useful assistance at the special administrative counseling counter. This was one of the typical items on our agenda of activity at the time of the disaster.

TANI: Well, our effort following March 11th is still in progress. We seem to have talked at some length and it would be difficult to summarize, but we are running out of time. Perhaps we could just mention what we have felt most strongly about in our activity thus far, Mr. Sato, do you have any comment?

SATO: Well, I don't know if this is an issue covered by administrative counseling but I faced many tragic situations in our city, with lives being claimed by the tsunami because people had been given the wrong evacuation procedure or route. My local area, Sanriku coast has had a history of suffering tsunamis. Therefore, people must have been aware of the horrors caused by a tsunami.

We have been taught from way back, that in the event of a tsunami heading our way, we should immediately run to higher ground, leaving our belongings behind, and not even to pay too much heed to what is happening to other people. In our local dialect we must run away in a "tendenko" manner, meaning we must immediately save ourselves.

We were also taught not to have anything in our hands. We should keep our hands free for carrying a child on our back whilst fleeing and for holding onto driftwood when being washed away. I guess such lessons hadn't got through widely and that added to the number of fatalities.

As to the evacuation procedures followed by schools, they were incredibly varied. One of the schools followed a standard disaster and emergency manual and as a result, failed to escape from the tsunami with the result that many died. By contrast, another school didn't have any victims, having created its own disaster manual and having repeatedly carried out a preparatory drill.

Judging by these examples, I believe it is vital to introduce disaster-prevention education which is tailored to the local circumstances in all levels of school, and for that to be an administrative priority.

SASAKI: When local authorities, which have responsibility to directly provide services to the people are hit by a catastrophic event and are practically paralyzed, the activity of central government's administrative counseling service could subsidize a part of their function. The original activity of administrative counselors in dealing with complaints and requests from the public is in itself a passive

activity. But in the course of receiving and sorting out complaints and requests relating to the disaster, we can see that the counselor could be an active provider of information about the various supportive measures for refugees. Thus I found that our function of administrative counseling could be proactive rather than reactive and passive, as a provider of information.

Consequently, it could be said that dealing with complaints and requests could play a significant role in communicating

governmental policies and measures to the people in the event of a breakdown in normal transmission of information, which could hold good for other disasters too.



TANI: The assumption of such a role could be useful for government in conveying practical measures equally and fairly to those affected, thus it would help promote “good governance”, as is the aim of all ombudsmen and as Ms. Morales, Ombudsman of the Philippines described in the last session.

We administrative counselors aren't government officials but ordinary citizens who gain no reward from our activity as counselors. But on the occasion of this disaster not a few people engaged in their activity of administrative counseling despite being themselves directly affected by the crisis. Each counselor's motivation for offering his services might have been different, but I believe most of them were fired up to resume their administrative counselor role by seeing their fellow-citizens in trouble.

People in the refugee camps were able to come to us directly and tell us about their worries, questions, complaints or requests. They were able to do this knowing that counselors are private citizens and live alongside them in their neighborhoods; we are accessible to them and no one 'special'. I think this is why we were able to be of real help to the refugees at the time of the quake.

The administrative counselor is one of the important elements in the ombudsman system operating in our country and I believe we have proved our real worth on this occasion.

And speaking as President of the National Federation of Administrative Counselors' Associations, I also believe that the importance of supporting individual activity through mutual cooperation between all administrative counselors is by now well recognized.

In this memorable year of the 50th anniversary of the administrative counselors system, therefore, I would like to end this session by paying tribute to our activity in the Great East Japan Earthquake.