

Basic Knowledge of Volunteer Activities during Disasters

The Kumamoto Earthquake which struck on April 14th inflicted terrible damage on the impacted areas. During times like these, the power of disaster aid volunteers manifests itself, and their work carries great responsibility. On the 22nd, a local government organization was established for the opening of disaster aid volunteer centres. In order to properly communicate the goodwill of the volunteers to those effected by the disaster, there are some codes of manners and mental attitudes which each volunteers is required to uphold. These are the guidelines regarding basic knowledge for all who aspire to be disaster aid volunteers.

What is a disaster aid volunteer?

During a disaster, an individual or organisation who:

1. contributes their time and energy without remuneration and
2. demonstrates spontaneous, autonomous and innovative aid efforts while
3. working in areas that government entities cannot reach with the
4. aim to secure the lifestyle and independence of victims.

What are the requirements for being a disaster aid volunteer?

◆ A disaster aid volunteer's [heart · skills · corpus]

Disaster aid involves heavy work such as saving lives in severe environments.

[heart] · · contributing to society or compassionate towards victims (a relationship of trust and interdependence)

[skills] · · meeting the necessary ability criterion for aid work (basic knowledge and independence standards)

[corpus] · · must be able to work well in an organization and in collaboration with others (collaborative cooperation and team play)

◆ Let's learn the 8 principles

1. Do not push your body to the limit (health monitoring)
2. Take responsibility for your activities
3. Maintain rules and manners while conducting the activity... you must not create a disturbance in the disaster-affected area.
4. Be ready to learn constantly.
5. Cherish your encounters with others.
6. Empathise with victims... put yourself in the victim's shoes.
7. Spur the strength of the victims.
8. Merge and share your strength with everyone. Victims and volunteers will combine their strength together.

◆ What do we seek from a disaster aid volunteer? [4 criterion]

In order to make the volunteer activity meaningful for society, you must be...

- Self-sufficient: take entire responsibility for your own meals, movements, accommodation etc. and bring your own rubbish back home.
- Self-administrative: conduct yourself safely so as to not become ill or injured.
- Self-organising: play as a team member so that group activities can run smoothly.

- Self-realising: learn and grow from your volunteer activities, and treasure your sense of achievement.

What are you supposed to do before you go volunteer?

1. Collect information about devastated districts

Understand well the situation of both devastated area and demand/possibility of aid

- ① Know the demand from devastated districts and victims– Learn and understand ‘Where is aid needed’, ‘Who needs aid’, ‘what is needed’ from newspaper or from other media.
- ② Learn geography, general atmosphere, climate in the devastated area. –‘When in Rome, do as the Romans do’. Knowing climate is necessary for your safety.
- ③ Know the environment of volunteer –transportation including car park, distribution of water or drink, accommodation, environment of volunteer center (is it set up?).

2. Apply for volunteer

You need to work in a team during volunteering at the devastated area (for efficiency, safety, cooperation).

It is necessary to visit a reception (self-organized) to join a group.

Host: a ‘volunteer center’ ‘support center’ is set up on site or surrounding by council of social welfare or NPO (you can access them online first)

Sender: receptions for volunteer are set up at autonomous community, council of social welfare, NPO, universities. Some receptions offer bus for volunteer or have ‘volunteer package’.

3. Book transportation and accommodation by yourself

4. Prepare your belongings ※back of the front cover: refer to a manual for belongings

《example》 outfit: should be easy to move, shoes with thick sole, cotton work gloves, mask...

Belongings: rain jacket, umbrella, battery, plastic bags

Food: drinks, emergency food (candy, chocolate)

Living ware: towels, toilet set, first aid material, mouthwash...

Others: health insurance card, mobile phone, map...

5. Get volunteer-insurance (ask the group you are going to join)

6. Have instruction course or orientation beforehand

- First thing you are supposed to do in devastated areas

Matching: Get a shift or work requests at a disaster volunteer center or a volunteer tent (make sure that you take over work that you can)

Research of the area: Ask senior volunteers for advice about the work you do. Walk around the area before you get started and try to know the place (dangerous area)

- during work, after work

Self-administrative: take a enough rest. Do not overwork. Follow the two-week-regulation.

Listen to victims: understand what people need through communication and learn each other.

Look back the day with other members: look back the day and find the meaning of your work and solutions.

Be cool-down.

Write a report: with a report to a volunteer center, write a report for you, people supported you and people who are going to volunteer and hold a session.

How to communicate with people in devastated areas

What is a shelter?

●role of shelters

- offer safe temporal places to live, without danger
- confirm the safety of family
- provide information for living
- provide food, water, aid supply

●what is unusual?

- ① The space allocated to each person is so small and anyone can enter/go out that it is difficult to take a rest and have personal space.
- ② Eating and sleeping at the same place makes the life invariable.
- ③ Possibility of no water supply or bad smell, unusual odor and bugs due to garbage.
- ④ Might not get aid supplies such as food, water, bedclothes.
- ⑤ Difficult to find a place to take a shower or change clothes, as well as problems and uncleanness in toilets.

●How can we make the life in shelter better

- wash hands
- gargle
- exercise
- air ventilation
- drink enough water
- laugh

Changes of the evacuees' state of mind and heart in a shelter over time

	Physical symptoms	Mental state	Emotional state	Behavior	Major features
Right after a disaster and the following few days (Acute phase)	Increased pulse; rapid breathing; higher blood pressure; perspiration; trembling; dizziness; fainting	Difficulty in thinking rationally; loss of concentration, memory, and judgement	In a stupor; afraid; anxious; sad; angry	Irritated; restless; rigid; accusatory; compromised communication ability	Fight-or-flight response
One to six weeks after a disaster (Responsive phase)	Headache; backache; accumulation of fatigue; nightmares; sleep disorder	Begin to understand the harshness of the situation.	Remembering the apex of sadness, harshness, and fear experienced when the disaster struck. Sense of depression, loss, guilt, and exaltation.	Fear for going back to the disaster scene; increased intake of alcohol.	Suppressed feelings may erupt.
One to six months after a disaster (Recovery phase)	Same as in the responsive period, except that the intensity declines gradually.	Gradually, you begin to be able to think by yourself.	Sad; lonely; anxious	Avoid getting near the disaster scene.	While you begin to be able to care about your daily life and your future, the memory of the disaster comes back.
Reconstruction phase	Although the speed of the recovery differs among individuals, people become more able to accept their experiences as facts, without stress, when they look back on the disaster. Also, they are more ready to deal with other stressful matters.				