



Japan Post Group A Record of the Great East Japan Earthquake



Japan Post Group

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Approx. 20,000 people perished or missing

Feature 1

Overview of the Great East Japan Earthquake

Earthquake intensity and tsunami height of each region



Miyako City	Upper 5 seismic intensity	Max 9.3m
Kamaishi City	Lower 6 seismic intensity	Max 9.3m
Ofunato City	Lower 6 seismic intensity	Max 16.7m
Rikuzentakata City	Lower 6 seismic intensity	Max 15.8m
Kesennuma City	Lower 6 seismic intensity	Max 13.6m
Ishinomaki City	Lower 6 seismic intensity	Max 7.7m
Higashimatsushima City	Upper 6 seismic intensity	Max 5.8m
Sendai City	Upper 6 seismic intensity	Max 7.2m
Iwaki City	Lower 6 seismic intensity	Max 4.8m

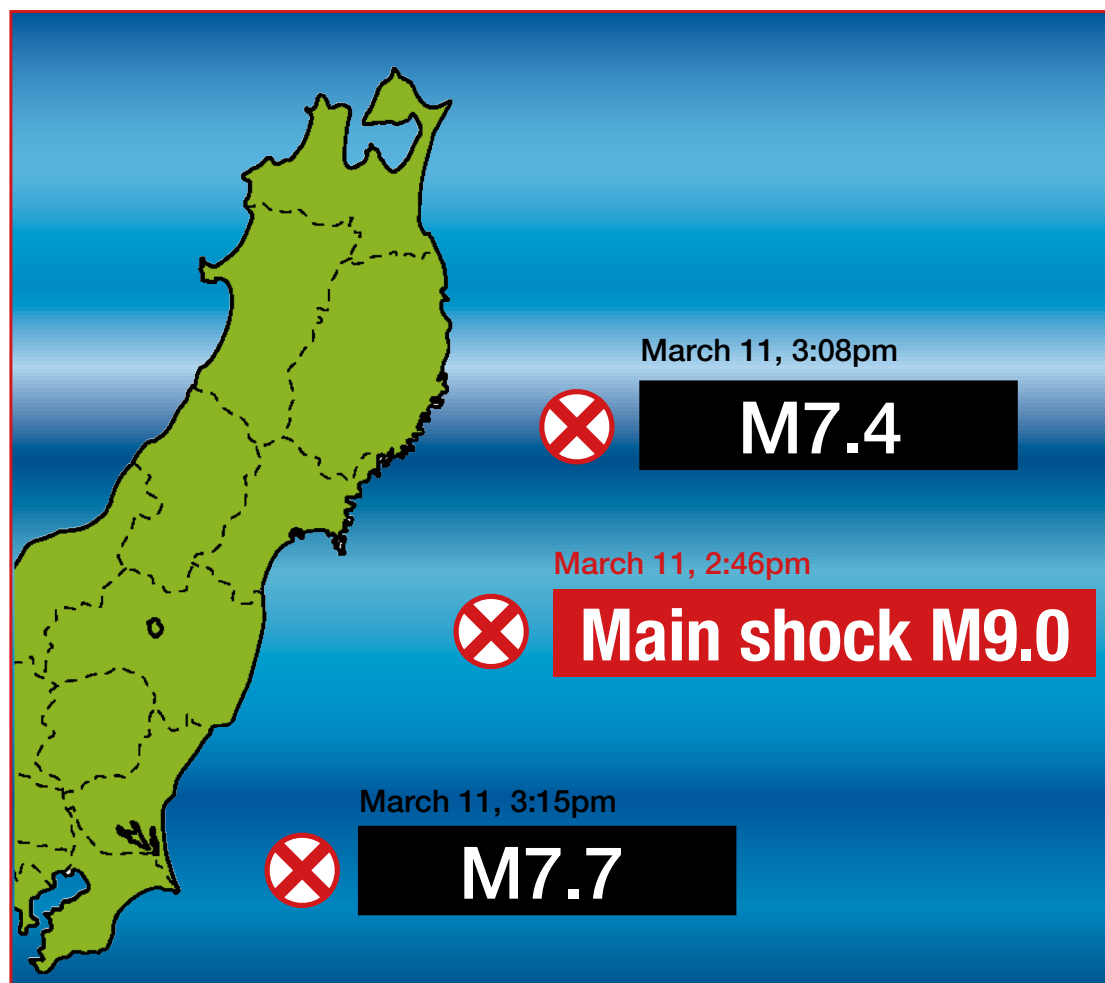
*References from the Port and Airport Research Institute, University of Tokyo, Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology, and the Meteorological Agency.
*The height of tsunamis is inferred from the height of tsunami marks.

How the earthquake and tsunami occurred

Magnitude 9.0, the largest recorded domestically

Out of all natural disasters that have occurred since the Meiji period, the Great East Japan Earthquake, which struck on March 11, 2011, caused a scale of damage second only to the Great Kanto Earthquake. Earthquakes occurred one after the other in the short space of 30 minutes in three different areas, producing severe shaking and large tsunamis.

With the three earthquakes occurring in such a short space of time, seismic intensities from 6 to 7 were recorded in regions from Iwate Prefecture to Ibaraki Prefecture.



Sinking and shifting of the ground

The earthquake caused sinking of the ground and soil liquefaction in different areas. The ground was confirmed to have sunk in Rikuzentakata City by 84cm, in Ofunato City by 73cm, in Kamaishi City by 66cm, and in Miyako City by 50cm.

Furthermore, the Oshika Peninsula shifted 5.3 meters to the east-southeast, and its ground sunk by around 1.2 meters. Due to this, the water wouldn't recede in regions damaged by the tsunami, thus hampering recovery work.



The vicinity of Tsurushihama Beach Resort, Shinchi Town, Soma County, Fukushima Prefecture
The manhole that was set in the ground was completely thrust aboveground by the effects of the earthquake. The tsunami washed away most of the buildings in this area as well.



Shinmaiko Beach in Iwaki City, Fukushima Prefecture
The earthquake made protrusions and depressions in the parking lot next to the beach. The building in the background is the hotel Kampe no Yado Iwaki.

The vicinity of Tona in Higashimatsushima City, Miyagi Prefecture.
The water in the distance is not the coastline but actually water from the sea accumulated due to the ground having sunk. With the road having been torn apart, the recovery work was seriously hindered. Many areas ended up like this through the rise and fall of the tides.

An unimaginable tsunami

A major tsunami surpassing that of the 1896 Sanriku Earthquake

The enormous earthquakes that occurred in succession on the seabed of the Pacific Ocean caused an enormous tsunami. Serious damage was sustained by the towns on the Pacific Ocean coastline of the Tohoku area.

The run-up height of the tsunami (the height that the waves ran up slopes on the land) was recorded as 38 meters in Miyako City, Iwate Prefecture. In the Taro area of Miyako City, the 10-meter tall super embankment, set up as a lesson from the 1896 Sanriku Earthquake-triggered huge tsunami, was this time surpassed by the giant tsunami and the town was swallowed up.

It was reported that along the Pacific Ocean coastline of the Tohoku area there were instances where the direction from which the tsunami would enter the land was misread. There were even testimonies that claimed that at a section of Matsukawa Port in Soma City, Fukushima Prefecture, the waves swept in from not the port located under the high area, but from the opposite direction.

The tsunami that ran the rivers upstream

The region damaged by the earthquake-triggered tsunami was wide in scope. One reason for this was the way that the tsunami ran the rivers upstream.

In addition, the rivers were similar to a ria-style coastal inlet and were narrower in width the more inland they were, causing the tsunami to grow in height. In Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture, the tsunami ran up the old Kitakami River for 50 kilometers. For the Natori River, which runs through the Sendai Plain, the tsunami ran the river upstream twice the speed it ran up the land, causing large damage to the regions far away from the sea.



The Hakozaiki area of Kamaishi City, Iwate Prefecture
The tsunami reached even the regions far away from the coastline. In this area a boat collided with a house.



The Taro area of Miyako City, Iwate Prefecture
In the distance the super embankment can be seen. The tsunami went over the top of this embankment.



The Gamou area in Miyagino Ward, Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture
This was originally an area where many houses stood, but the tsunami swept most of them away.



Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture
Traces of water left on the wall of the Ishinomaki branch of Japan Post Service Co., Ltd. Despite being far from the coastline, the waves were able to reach up to here.



Jodo Temple in Rikuzentakata, Iwate Prefecture
The tsunami climbed up to this temple, which stands at the foot of a mountain. Cherry blossom trees are scheduled to be planted here to mark the maximum point the tsunami reached.



Otsuchi Town, Iwate Prefecture
With its wide range, the tsunami ran through the town. The buildings in the foreground had turned black due to fire.



Tsugaruishi in Miyako City, Iwate Prefecture
A train pushed away by the tsunami. The passengers and train staff had evacuated right after the earthquake occurred and so were safe.



Utatsu Town, Miyagi Prefecture
This fishing boat was carried inland by the tsunami which ran the rivers upstream. The building in the distance is Utatsu Post Office.

Scars from an earthquake and tsunami of
unprecedented scope

Feature 2

Damage to Japan Post Group



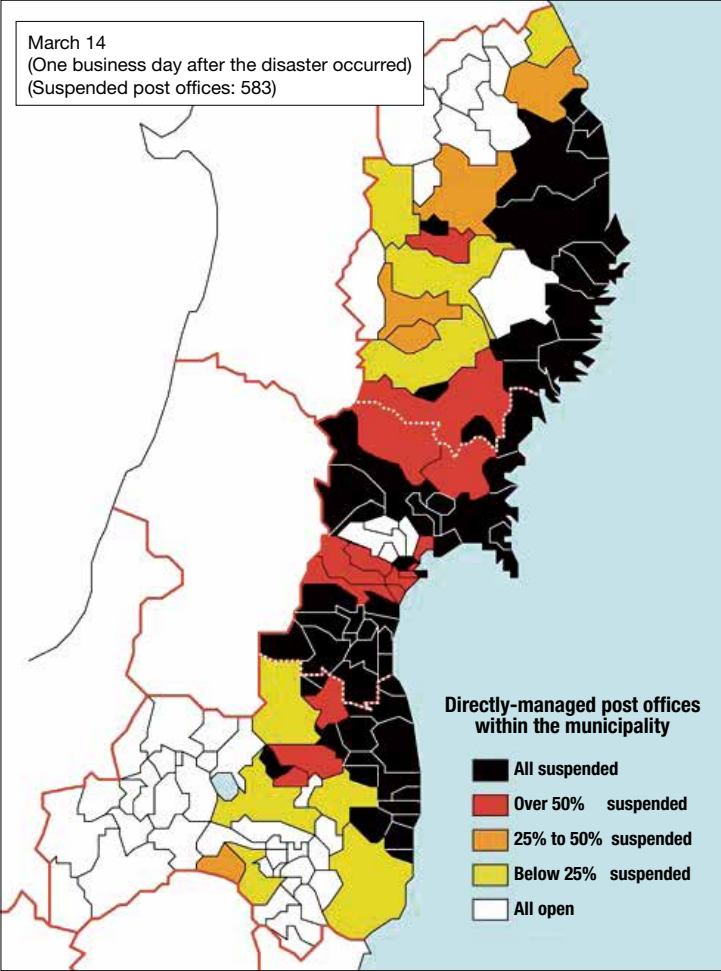
Damage from the tsunami at Shizugawa Post Office, in Minami-Sanriku Town,
Miyagi Prefecture

Damage to Japan Post Group

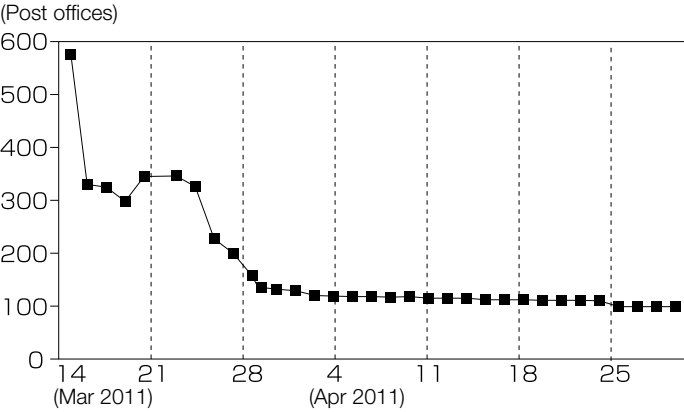
From March 14, 2011, the start of the week after the earthquake disaster, out of the 1,103 directly-managed post offices and 319 contracted post offices within three prefectures of Tohoku (Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima Prefectures), around half of them suspended work – 583 directly-managed post offices and 100 contracted post offices.

On April 26, 2011, in Rikuzentakata City, Iwate Prefecture, the first temporary office after the disaster was established (substituting Rikuzentakata Post Office) and it began operating normal over-the-counter services and ATMs. In addition, Ofunato Post Office and Kamaishi Post Office, of which both sustained severe damages, began over-the-counter services and ATMs from June 10, 2011 (Ofunato Post Office's ATM services began operations early from May 20), and in other regions as well services were reopened one after the other through temporary offices. As of the end of May 2012, the number of post offices still suspending work has decreased to 53 directly-managed post offices and 27 contracted post offices.

■The reopening of directly-managed post offices after the disaster (Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima Prefectures)



■Amount over time of directly-managed post offices with suspended service counters



Utatsu Post Office in Minami-Sanriku Town, Miyagi Prefecture



Unosumai Post Office in Kamaishi City, Iwate Prefecture



Temporary office for Rikuzentakata Post Office



1. Human losses

		(unit: people)
Japan Post Network Co., Ltd	Directly-managed	20
	Contracted post offices	8
Japan Post Service Co., Ltd		28
Japan Post Holdings Co., Ltd		3
Other subsidiaries, etc.		3*
Total		62

* Employees of both Japan Post Transport Co., Ltd and of transport contracting companies.

2. Damage to buildings (when the disaster occurred)

Japan Post Network Co., Ltd

■Directly-managed post offices (unit: post offices)

Prefecture	No. of post offices	Complete destruction	Partial destruction, etc.	Flooding
Hokkaido	1,215	0	0	2
Aomori	267	0	0	2
Iwate	308	27	2	4
Miyagi	363	24	9	22
Fukushima	432	7	4	1
Ibaraki	465	0	0	1
Chiba	691	0	0	1
Total	3,741	58	15	33

Total damaged post offices: 106

■Contracted post offices (unit: post offices)

Prefecture	No. of post offices	Complete destruction	Partial destruction, etc.	Flooding
Iwate	118	13	2	1
Miyagi	89	9	1	2
Fukushima	112	2	0	1
Ibaraki	54	1	0	0
Total	373	25	3	4

Total damaged post offices: 32

Damaged ATMs: 131 (only those installed in post offices)

Japan Post Network Co., Ltd

(No. of delivery centers are in the brackets) (unit: branches)

Prefecture	No. of post offices	Complete destruction	Partial destruction, etc.	Flooding
Iwate	15 (75)	2 (3)	1 (1)	(1)
Miyagi	18 (67)	(8)	(1)	3 (4)
Fukushima	21 (105)	0	(1)	0
Ibaraki	31 (53)	0	0	(1)
Chiba	48 (48)	0	0	(1)
Total	133 (348)	2 (11)	1 (3)	3 (7)

Damaged sorting machines: 3
Damaged vehicles: 470*
(details) Two-wheelers: 325
Four-wheelers: 145

*Currently under investigation so may change.

Japan Post Holdings Co., Ltd

Kampo no Yado

■Hotels that suspended business due to building damage, etc.

Iwate Prefecture:	1 (Ichinoseki)
Akita Prefecture:	1 (Yokote)
Miyagi Prefecture:	1 (Matsushima)
Yamagata Prefecture:	1 (Sakata)
Fukushima Prefecture:	2 (Koriyama, Iwaki)
Ibaraki Prefecture:	2 (Oharai, Itako)
Tochigi Prefecture:	1 (Kitsuregawa Hot Springs)
Chiba Prefecture:	1 (Asahi)
Total:	10

Also, at some facilities of Japan Post Bank Co., Ltd and Japan Post Insurance Co., Ltd. there were buildings of which sustained partial damage.

3. Post offices temporarily closed due to the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant (as of the end of May 2012)

		(unit: people)
Directly-managed		20
Contracted post offices		7

[Left photo]
A post box sealed off during a full-town temporary evacuation due to the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant.

[Right photo]
The hotel Kampo no Yado Matsushima, of which received severe damage from the tsunami.



Scars of the tsunami

Along with the enormous earthquake, major tsunamis occurred at different areas along the Pacific Ocean coastline. The damage was especially extreme in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima Prefectures, and here the post offices were also caught up in the catastrophe.

[Top photo]
Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture. Many flowers were placed on the site where a convenience store once stood. On the right edge can be seen a post box pillar.

[Right photo]
Shizugawa Delivery Center in Minami-Sanriku Town, Miyagi Prefecture
Delivery bikes that sustained damage from the tsunami.

[Bottom photo]
Shizugawa Post Office in Minami-Sanriku Town, Miyagi Prefecture
The roof of the delivery center was destroyed and fell down. The post office building was completely submerged under water.



Tokura Post Office in Minami-Sanriku Town, Miyagi Prefecture
Large amounts of wood and fishing equipment were swept inside the building.



Utatsu Post Office in Minami-Sanriku Town, Miyagi Prefecture
This signboard was swept off its base and snapped in two.



Otani Post Office in Kesennuma City, Miyagi Prefecture
This iron fence was severely deformed by the flow of the tsunami.



Tokura Post Office in Minami-Sanriku Town, Miyagi Prefecture
The post office building was destroyed by the tsunami and landslides. The surrounding road was also ripped apart.



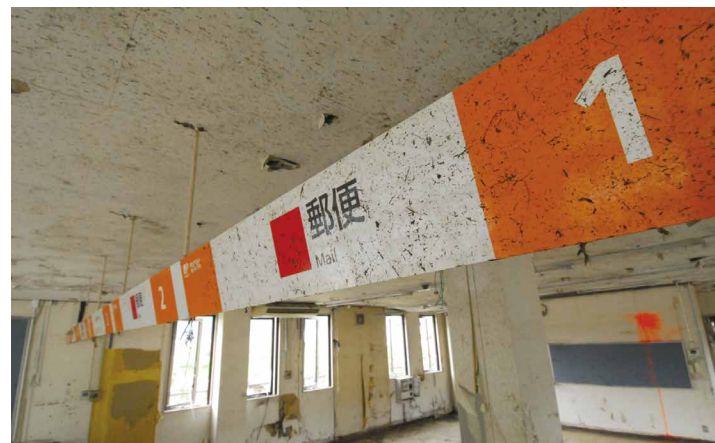
Yamada Post Office in Yamada Town, Iwate Prefecture
A boat sits atop the building, having been swept over by the tsunami.



Rikuzentakata Post Office in Rikuzentakata City, Iwate Prefecture
The tsunami reached a height that completely submerged the four-story apartment building in front of the post office.



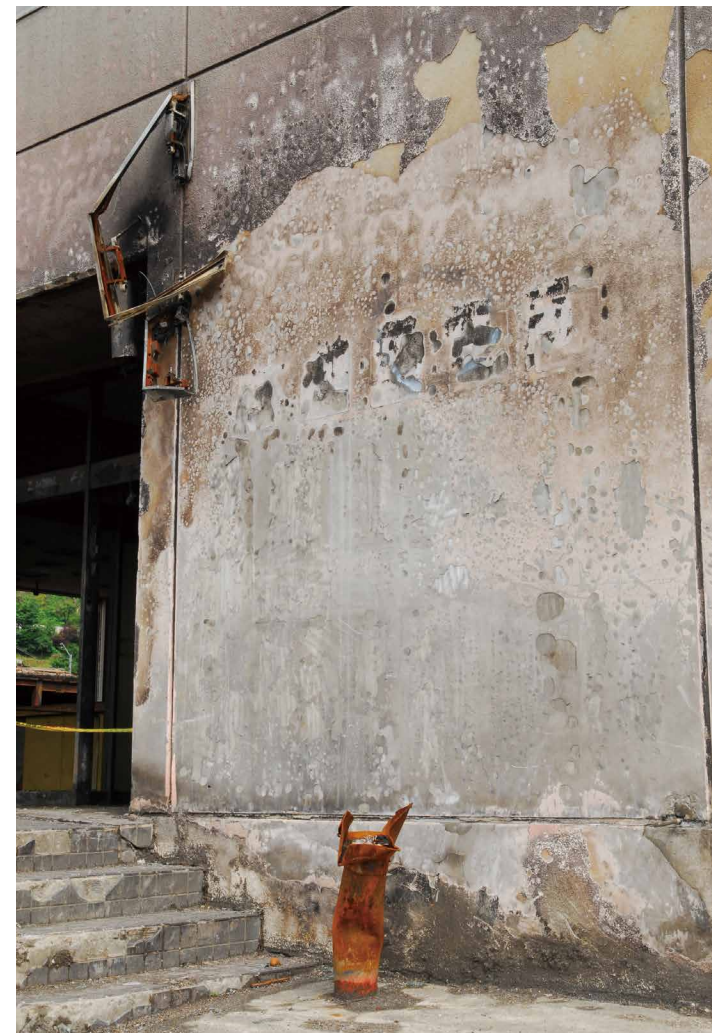
Hakozaeki Post Office in Kamaishi City, Iwate Prefecture
The recovery work in this region was late to begin, with the debris remaining untouched for a while after the disaster.



Unosumai Post Office in Kamaishi City, Iwate Prefecture
The building was completely submerged underwater, traces of which remain clearly on the signboards above the counter.



Kuwagasaki Post Office in Miyako City, Iwate Prefecture
The tsunami collided directly with the front of the post office. The slant of the walls shows how the water escaped from the building.



[Top-right photo]
Sanriku Post Office in Ofunato City, Iwate Prefecture
Along with the tsunami, large amounts of debris and sand entered inside the post office.

[Left photo]
Otsuchi Post Office in Otsuchi Town, Iwate Prefecture
The entrance wall burnt by fire.

[Bottom-right photo]
Tsurushihama Post Office in Shinchi Town, Fukushima Prefecture
The whole district was washed away by the tsunami. Only a pillar from a post box remains of the post office.

[Bottom-left photo]
Yamada Town, Iwate Prefecture
The embankment beside the damaged Yamada Post Office. The large mass of concrete that was the embankment was mowed down.



Temporary post office closures due to the nuclear power plant accident

Due to the Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant accident caused by the earthquake, the village of Iitate in Soma County, Fukushima Prefecture, underwent a full-village evacuation, and all post offices within the village were temporarily closed.

Iiso Post Office is positioned slightly away from the center of the village, but as a post office of a tight-knit region it played an essential role for the local residents. Those who visited would talk with the staff, asking each other when they would come back and where they were going, before leaving the post office behind. Currently there's no prospect of the post office reopening. With the hope for the day when the staff can return to the same spot and provide the villagers with service again, as of June 30, 2011 Iiso Post Office has been deemed temporarily closed.



A staff member seals up a post box.
Being under such unusual circumstances the staff member looked on at the sealed box with tears in his eyes.

The struggle when each the branches, delivery centers and points of delivery were devastated

Feature 3 Delivering in the disaster areas

The disaster completely overturned people's everyday lives.

The branches and delivery centers of Japan Post Service Co., Ltd sustained severe damage, and addresses that were delivered to were found to be deserted.

This section tracks the efforts of branches and delivery centers in the disaster areas that worked hard to deliver post to customers whilst undergoing various hardships.



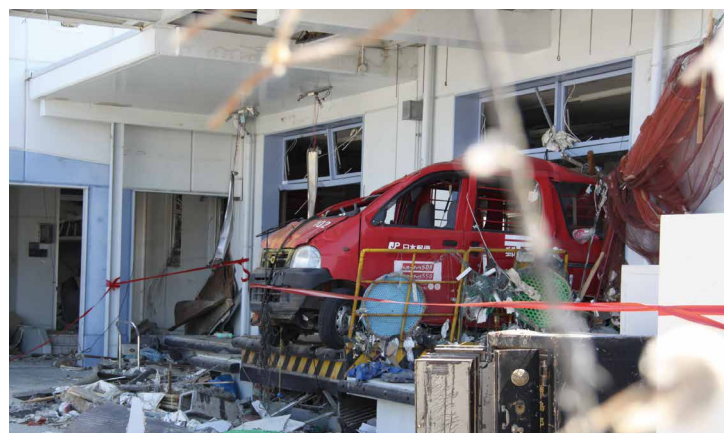
Affects on deliveries due to infrastructure breakdown



Towns that lost normality

Everyday conveniences that we take for granted were stolen away by the disaster.

In the areas hit by severe damage, there were serious impairments to the delivery work. Not only the houses were damaged, lifelines such as electricity, gas and water were stopped for an extended period of time, and roads were disrupted due to cracks in the ground, the sinking of the ground, and the large cluttering of debris. Also, great hindrances to the work were caused not only by damages to buildings, but also the fact that vehicles and motorbikes had been swept away. These conditions caused the delivery work to become extremely difficult.



A delivery vehicle that was plunged inside the post office by the tsunami.

Deliveries in towns without electricity

In high-rise buildings such as apartment blocks, because collective mail boxes on the first floors were unable to be used, it became necessary to deliver the post items to each room separately. However, as the disaster caused blackouts, elevators were unable to be used, meaning delivering to each floor required using the staircases. Additionally, because the traffic lights in the towns were suspended due to the blackouts, when driving vehicles, the post workers needed to take much more care than usual.



A policeman directs traffic as the traffic lights had stopped functioning due to blackouts.

A staff member climbs the staircase of an apartment block in Kamaishi City to deliver the post.



[Top-left photo]
Motorbikes gathered from branches across the nation. The bike with the Otsuchi Town number plate escaped damage as it was delivering on high ground during the disaster.

[Top-right photo]
Delivery vehicles of different number plates from across the country are lined up in the parking lot of Japan Post Service Co., Ltd. Ishinomaki branch.

[Center photo]
A road ruined by the earthquake and tsunami. In regions close to the coast, the delivery work faced enormous hindrances as not just the roads were destroyed but also bridges and other infrastructure had fallen down.

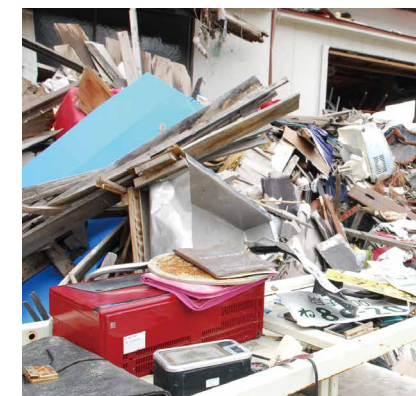
[Bottom photo]
A sidewalk buried in debris. For a while after the disaster the debris overflowed onto the roadway.

Delivery on foot and by bicycle, and vehicle support from different areas

In places where the roadways were blocked by debris, delivery was done on foot. Some places were dangerous and required climbing over debris.

Out of those waiting eagerly for the arrival of postal items, one customer was living in a shelter surrounded by debris covered in mud and dust, and described the female staff member who arrived to deliver the post items as "like a flower blossoming in a colorless world of debris." Also, as even the motorbikes that had escaped damage were unable to be used due to lack of fuel, the use of bicycles was necessary in delivering the post even in regions with lesser debris.

After a while, motorbikes and other vehicles from branches across the country were gathered at the damaged branches. Thus for a period of time in the damaged areas, motorbikes and other vehicles that bore number plates from different regions were used for delivery.



Mountains of debris were a frequent site in the damaged areas

The surge in returned and forwarded postal items



Rikuzentakata City, Iwate Prefecture

Uninhabited delivery addresses

In regions that suffered great damage, many buildings were washed away by the tsunami or burnt down in the subsequent fires. Many receivers of mail were forced to live in shelters that were gymnasiums or community centers.

Damage from the tsunami also spanned to public institutions such as town halls, and so directly after the disaster, it was difficult to get a hold of where receivers of mail who were victims were sheltering. As a result, because the receivers were not at the delivery addresses, postal items were unable to be delivered.



Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture



[Left photo]
Inside a shelter
Delivery of mail was carried out by calling out for the mail-receivers over the clothes.



[Right photo]
Checking the name registry put up at a shelter.

Delivery to shelters and temporary housing

Afterwards, name registries of victims evacuated to the shelters were prepared by the communities, and the branches worked together with these communities in order to understand where the receivers of mail were sheltering. As a result, they were able to know where many of them were, however delivering mail would take up a large amount of time as each time the staff needed to confirm who the receiver was or if they were a family member.

Up until the end of August 2011, the shelters were closed and many of the homeless victims were moved to temporary housing. There were some who didn't notify the post office when they moved from the shelter to the temporary housing, and so more effort was needed once again in finding where they lived.



At shelters mail was mostly delivered face-to-face.



[Top-left photo]
Japan Post Service Co., Ltd Ishinomaki branch.
Inputting data from change-of-address notices for processing the forwarding of mail.

[Top-right photo]
Processing the forwarding of mail at Japan Post Service Co., Ltd Kamaishi branch, Otsuchi Delivery Center.



The never-ending forwarding of mail

There was an enormous quantity of postal items that were either returned to the sender because the shelter or whereabouts of the receiver was unknown, or that was forwarded to the receiver who was sheltering in a region covered by a different postal branch. Due to this added work, at many branches temporary staff were employed to deal with the processing for forwarding mail. Initially it was anticipated that these post items needing to be returned or forwarded would soon decrease in number, however even after six months there was no sign of reduction and so the work involved in processing continued on. The usage of staff in this meant that the assigning of staff (from areas where there weren't any points of delivery anymore) to areas where the amount of deliveries had increased through temporary housing continued to be unfeasible.



Rikuzentakata City, Iwate Prefecture. Temporary housing set up in the playground of an elementary school. Many victims of the disaster who lived in shelters were moved to live here.

Setting up temporary branches and delivery centers



Rikuzentakata branch was set up in a location considerably far away from where it originally was, but the neighboring residents of the new area welcomed it as 'making things more convenient'.

Reopening branches and delivery centers

In order to restart the work of delivering mail, the functions of branches and delivery centers had to be revived.

However, because damaged facilities were unable to be used, it was decided that in order to carry out work, spaces in other branches would be borrowed or new general office spaces would be procured. Still, usable buildings were limited, as even general office buildings in the disaster areas had suffered severe damage, and so in some cases the branch had to move far away from where it was originally situated.

For Japan Post Service Co., Ltd Ishinomaki branch in Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture, 7 of its 15 delivery centers were completely destroyed by the tsunami. For 6 of the centers, including Onagawa, space was borrowed from Ishinomaki branch and other centers that had not received severe damage in order to restart work, and Shizugawa Delivery Center borrowed a section of the buildings of the old Hayashigiwa

Elementary School.

For Japan Post Service Co., Ltd Kamaishi branch in Kamaishi City, Iwate Prefecture, both Otsuchi and Unosumai delivery centers, of which sustained damage through the tsunami and fires, borrowed a store that originally rented out nursing care equipment and that was on high ground in Otsuchi Town, and restarted work there.

Also at Japan Post Service Co., Ltd Rikuzentakata branch in Rikuzentakata City, Iwate Prefecture, in order to start delivering the mail even a day earlier, they first borrowed space in the front yard of a staff member's home, of which had escaped the disaster, and restarted work there. Afterwards, they moved to a community center situated in the mountainous area, and as work restarted on a larger scale and postal items increased, they once again moved their work facilities, this time to an empty factory near the community center. The Rikuzentakata branch



[Top-right photo]

A temporary delivery center set up in Otsuchi Town, Iwate Prefecture. It's using a general office building.

[Top-left photo]

The community center which was temporarily used as the Rikuzentakata branch. However, due to being cramped, once Yu-pack (parcel) delivery work restarted the branch was moved to a factory that was previously for manufacturing vehicle parts, and that was just below where the community center was.

[Bottom-left photo]

Checking and sorting at the Rikuzentakata branch that used a factory that was previously for manufacturing vehicle parts. As nearly all equipment had been damaged by the tsunami, everything from desks to checking and sorting racks had to be substituted by something else. This checking and sorting rack is made of cardboard boxes.

was originally situated in the center of town on the seaward side, however the temporary branch that used the empty factory was around 11km away from this original location towards the mountains, and so when delivering mail the furthest destination was around 40km each way, taking around 40 minutes each way. For the equipment too, checking and sorting racks made out of cardboard were used as substitution, and a power-generator was used to compensate for blackouts.

Afterwards in October 2011, a temporary office was built in a place closer to the original location in Takekoma Town, and in terms of equipment and space the work was able to be carried out to an extent that avoided inconveniences.



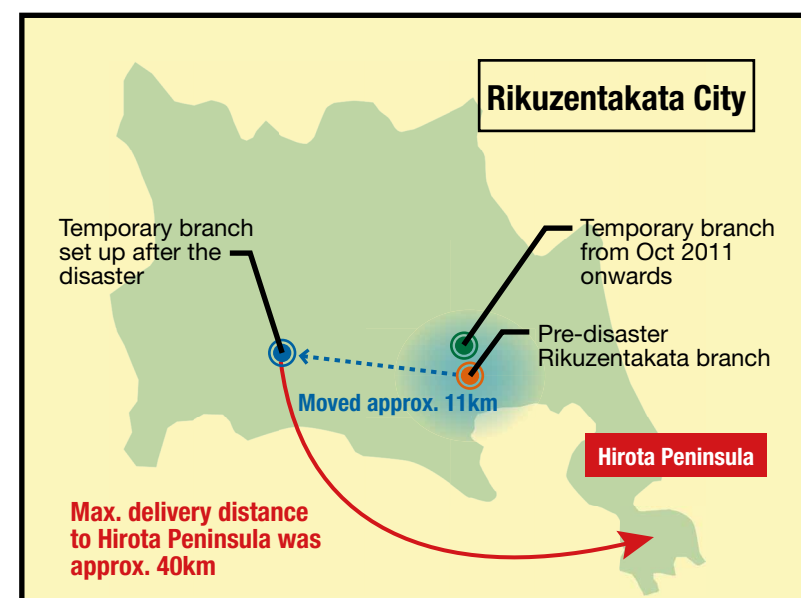
[Top photo]
Power-generators set up at a temporary facility that used an old factory.

[Left photo]
The temporary Rikuzentakata branch built in Takekoma Town, Rikuzentakata City.



Temporary housing built on an elementary school yard in the mountain area of Rikuzentakata City, Iwate Prefecture.

Changes in location of the temporary branch for Rikuzentakata branch



A postal worker delivering to a temporary housing region in Kamaishi City, Iwate Prefecture.

Strengthening bonds with customers

Feature 4

Service counters in the disaster areas

For a while in regions that had received severe damage from the disaster it was very difficult to lead normal lives.

Despite these circumstances, Japan Post Group put a variety of measures into action in order to restart services to customers as quickly as possible, and utmost efforts were taken to respond to the needs of customers.

Among these efforts, restarting crucial service counters was a matter of great urgency, and swift handling of this issue was called upon.



Using mobility to respond to customer's needs

Providing services through mobile post offices

Customers waiting eagerly for postal services

In regions where damage from the earthquake and tsunami was severe, critical damage to the communications network prevented devices such as mobile phones being able to be used, proving it difficult to make contact.

Also, many victims of the disaster had escaped with only their lives, and so didn't have any cash on them for everyday living. For the sake of these people, mobile post office services were put into operation from March 20, 2011, and services were provided including free distribution of postal cards, special handling of savings with limits of 200,000 yen per person, and insurance consultation.



A mobile post office setup in the precincts of a shrine in Ofunato City, Iwate Prefecture.



Natori City, Miyagi Prefecture. A mobile post office setup in the playground of Tatekoshi Elementary School of which was used as a shelter.



The stories of disaster victims were listened to sensitively.



To the workers of neighboring companies and factories, the mobile post offices were very handy in that they sold revenue stamps.



A mobile post office set up at the entrance to the general gymnasium (Bay Side Arena) that had become a shelter in Minami-Sanriku Town, Miyagi Prefecture. As soon as it opened, customers gathered.

Reopening services through mobility and organization

Mobile post offices were set up at the schools and gymnasiums that had become shelters in the regions that suffered especially large damage out of all the disaster areas. They began service on March 20, 2011, and, from March 28 on, 15 different vehicles were in operation.

The mobile post office set up at the general gymnasium (Bay Side Arena), that had become a shelter in Minami-Sanriku Town, Miyagi Prefecture, was run by each of the postmasters and staff of Shizugawa, Tokura and Utatsu Post Offices. As each of these post offices had suffered devastating damage from the tsunami, the staff borrowed space at Yonekawa Post Office and on weekdays, except for weekends and national holidays, travelled the distance of around 30km one-way to get there.

In regards to these conditions Shizugawa Post Office's Senior Sales staff Endo said that "the distance and the time restrictions were severe". Due to being far away from the base office and the opening hours being short – from 11:00am to 2:00pm – there were difficulties in providing proper service.

However, for many customers – from the victims who were living in the shelters to the neighboring residents and company workers – the mobile post offices were well appreciated. Especially due to the many factories close to the Bay Side Arena, there was great demand for revenue stamps, along with postal cards and normal stamps, and an average of 50 customers per day were using the services.

Right after setting up, in order to deal with the consultation of many customers, staff of Japan Post Bank and Japan Post Insurance handled the work as best as they could. For Japan Post Bank, there were many consultations concerning direct debits and deposits, of which also included consulting about inheritance. For Japan Post Insurance, there were many consultations about procedures for insurance claims and the paying of insurance. At the Japan Post Insurance Sendai Service Center, the system was augmented to carry out the work of insurance claims smoothly. Processing was done quickly in order to smoothly provide service to customers.

By the Japan Post Group unifying to deal in depth with consultations and claims with customers, and by making every effort to listen carefully to their testimonies, everyone worked hard to ease the worries of customers as much as possible.



The Japan Post Insurance Sendai Service Center Chief Koto talks about customer service.



A Japan Post Bank staff member listens to a customer.



A Japan Post Insurance staff member who came to provide support.



The Japan Post Group unified and worked hard to smoothly respond to the various issues of customers.

Opening the road to recovery by responding to the requests of the region

Reopening services by setting up temporary post offices

Meeting the expectations and demands of customers

Out of the total 1,103 directly-managed post offices in the three disaster-struck prefectures in Tohoku (Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima Prefectures), 583 – roughly half – suspended their operations on March 14, straight after the disaster. In spite of the natural disaster, having to close such a great number of post offices created a great inconvenience to customers.

The operating and sending of mobile post offices to shelters was carried out to resolve this inconvenience as much as possible, however these were not able to live up to the services available before the disaster. In order to provide regular post office services, the reopening of post offices was essential. Therefore, on April 26, 2011, Rikuzentakata Post Office in Iwate Prefecture was able to reopen as a post office through the first temporary office.

The Rikuzentakata Post Office Postmaster Sato spoke of the

significance of setting up a temporary post office. “Although the post offices of Rikuzentakata and the neighboring regions suffered devastating damage so much so that the providing of services was extremely difficult, it was very important and of great significance to be able to provide services as per before the disaster. It is also remarkable how despite many financial institutions having to run their services offline, the post offices were able to operate online right from when they reopened.”

At the temporary post offices ATMs were installed, and services mostly unchanged from before the disaster were able to be provided. Many customers voiced their gratitude towards this, saying that “it was an enormous help that I could come here and use them during my off-time from work”, and that “it’s so convenient now that we can withdrawal and send money with the ATMs.”



A staff member attending to a customer.



A message board put at the entrance.



Just before opening Rikuzentakata Post Office. Already many cars are parked out front.



ATMs installed at the temporary office of Rikuzentakata Post Office.

In addition, by listening to the stories of customers as best as possible at the counters and decorating the post office interiors to brighten them up, little by little the post office staff worked on doing what they could as post offices of close-knit communities to create spaces of peace and security for the customers.

Although due to the limited space at the temporary offices, there were times when accomplishing work with the same system as before proved to be difficult. At Rikuzentakata Post Office, Sales staff had to continually work on borrowed space at other neighboring post offices. As recovery of the regions has progressed, the needs of customers have also grown, and in order to maintain the quality of work it's thought that there are still many issues that need to be solved.



"It was good they were available during my off-hours." Many customers voiced their gratitude towards the restarting of work at the temporary office.



A staff member listens sensitively to a customer's issue.

An office room doubling as a locker room in the temporary office of Rikuzentakata Post Office. Due to the narrow space, some staff members had to do their work on fold-up tables or on the floor.



The disaster's effect on sales work

The effects of the disaster also spanned to the work of staff in charge of sales work.

For a while after the disaster, sales staff at Shizugawa Post Office in Minami-Sanriku Town, Miyagi Prefecture, carried out their work on borrowed space at Yonekawa Post Office in Tome City, around 30km away from Minami-Sanriku Town. Staff had to take around one hour by motorbike to get to their assigned regions, and due to this not only did the time in one day for providing service to customers become shorter, they were unable to promptly respond to urgent customer requests.



The Sales staff of Shizugawa Post Office prepare for work at Yonekawa Post Office in Tome City.



A motorbike provided by a post office in Akita Prefecture and used by the Sales staff of Shizugawa Post Office.



A Sales staff member during work stops by a mobile post office.



Sales staff of Rikuzentakata Post Office. Up until temporary offices could be ready after the disaster, work was conducted with Ofunato Post Office as a base.

Quickly responding to needs during emergencies

Extra counter service and trips to shelters



Dealing sensitively with those who'd met with tragedy

At post offices and Japan Post Banks in the Tohoku region, between March 13 and April 24, a total of 65 branches conducted extra service on weekends and national holidays. The carrying out of extraordinary handling of customers who'd lost their bankbooks or official seals was met by great relief from those customers who'd been caught up in the disaster.

With this being an unprecedented enormous disaster, it's thought that there were extremely large numbers of people who were both spiritually and physically exhausted, having had lost their family members, relatives and/or their homes. Each of the customers who visited the post offices and Japan Post Bank branches that were providing extra services bore their own circumstances, and many were living through worrying times. Due to these conditions, staff who dealt directly with customers at the counters would aim to first listen sensitively to their circumstances, instead of just handling things by-the-book.

Also, while going through procedures the staff would consider the customer's feelings and work hard to deal with them as respectfully as possible, being careful to choose the right words.



With the disaster being on such a large scale, many different initiatives were required.

Working immediately from whatever can be done

After the disaster, it proved difficult to promptly provide necessary services to customers. There were many obstacles caused by the earthquake and tsunami that stood in the way, including the collapse of buildings and roads, the suspension of lifelines such as electricity, gas and water, and the temporary paralysis of communications networks.

Under these circumstances, mobile post offices with their ability to be transferred to different areas were very effective. However, there were limits to their numbers, and as there were many areas where the roads were torn apart the necessary attitude was to work immediately from whatever could be done.

Thus staff headed to the shelters to provide services to victims, such as special handling of savings and the accepting of requests to reissue cash cards and insurance policies (documents). The initiatives for special handling of savings were met with great relief by victims who were living in the shelters.

Also, as both landline phones and mobile phones were having trouble connecting, the use of letters and postal cards was adopted, and people were very glad that staff had setup makeshift handmade post boxes at the shelters.



[Top-right photo]
Maita Community Center of which became a shelter in Noda Village, Iwate Prefecture.

[Right photo]
A handmade post box setup at the entrance to a shelter.

[Left photo]
A flag raised outside a shelter. It advertised the post office's trip to the shelter to the neighboring locals.



Trips to shelters were carried out for victims of the disaster who had no close access to a financial institution and had no way of travelling far. Many voiced in particular how the special handling of savings was "extremely helpful".

The work of Japan Post Group in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake Supporting the victims

Service counter operations

● Extra counter service

Post offices and Japan Post Bank branches in the Tohoku region undertook extra work on weekends and national holidays and provided services such as special handling of savings.

● Extra service through mobile post offices

Through mobile post offices, special handling of savings, offering of postal cards for free, and the receiving of applications for insurance consultations were carried out.

● Trips to shelters and other places

Shelters and other places were travelled to in order to provide service of special handling of savings.

Postal operations

● Providing of postal cards for free

Postal cards were provided for free and postal fees exempted for disaster victims.

● Delivering of postal items and parcels to the shelters

● Fee exemption of currency registration postal items of which were disaster relief funds

Fees were exempted for currency registration postal items that were disaster relief funds addressed to relief organizations.

● Issuing of charity stamps and postal cards

Charity postal cards (28 million issued on June 1, 2011) and stamps (70 million issued on June 21, 2011) were issued with the purpose of sending relief to victims.

Both the postal cards and stamps combined resulted in the allocation of 892.97 million yen of charity money to 83 organizations in the disaster areas.

● Distribution of New Year's donations

Applications for organizations receiving donations were reopened, and part of the New Year's donations in FY2011 (approx. 100 million yen) was distributed to those businesses that provide relief to victims.

Financial operations

● Special handling of savings and insurance

Special handling was carried out including: paying back ordinary deposits at a limit of 200,000 yen per person to victims who'd lost their bankbooks, documents or official seals; extending the period of which contracts don't go void for those who hadn't paid insurance fees (the payment grace period) to up to nine months; and special immediate payment of insurance money.

● Free sending service of disaster relief funds

A free sending service of disaster relief funds through normal payments to relief organizations was carried out.

Other operations

● Accepting victims from Kampo no Yado hotels

Victims were accepted based on requests from the national and local governments. Disaster support organizations, such as those related to the police, were also accommodated.

● Medical support through Teishin hospitals

Patients from Ishinomaki and Shiogama cities were accepted at Sendai Teishin Hospital, and a free health consultation counter was setup. To assist in checkups, medicines, examination materials and emergency patient non-perishable foodstuffs were transported from Teishin hospitals around the country.

● Setup of collection boxes for "collecting yellow post"

Disaster fund-raising operations taken up voluntarily by the staff of each company within the Japan Post Group were carried out through post office service counters across the country from March 22 to May 31, 2011. The amalgamated funds of 308,401,754 yen were distributed to 128 cities, towns and villages of which bore the brunt of the disaster.

● Donations of disaster relief funds

Relief funds of 300 million yen total – 100 million yen each from Japan Post Holdings Co., Ltd, Japan Post Bank Co., Ltd and Japan Post Insurance Co., Ltd – were donated on March 31, 2011.

Those who gathered at the lit up hospital

During the earthquake, Sendai City experienced a large scale blackout. Even as night fell the street lights wouldn't turn on, leaving the large city of Sendai cloaked in darkness.

Under these circumstances, at Sendai Teishin Hospital, of which had in-house power-generator equipment, neighboring residents, hotel guests, and those who had trouble getting home came to shelter temporarily. The hospital opened up its first-floor lobby as a shelter for these people and also provided blankets.

Additionally, for those who had fallen ill from the worry and stress of the disaster and living in the shelters, automatic blood pressure measuring devices were set up and free health consultations by nurses were also carried out. Furthermore, the use of electricity allowed for the recharging of mobile phones from the power source.



Messages of support sent from hospitals across the country.



Disaster victims took shelter for a while in the waiting room and on the sofas in front of each consultation room.

仙台逓信病院
Sendai Teishin Hospital
せんだいていしんびょういん



Director of the Nursing Service Department Sato (left) and Head Nurse Aoi (right) talk about the handling of disaster victims and the situation during the disaster.

Utilizing a variety of know-how to support the victims

At Kampo no Yado hotels, the facilities and know-how in hospitality and cooking were utilized for the sake of victims of both the tsunami and the nuclear power plant accident.

Facilities including guest rooms, banquet halls and bathhouses were used as shelters to accept victims of different disaster areas and those admitted to caring facilities. For handling these victims, staff were sensitive in their use of words and greetings so as to help alleviate their suffering.

In addition, cooking staff were dispatched to the shelters of different areas. They cooperated with Kampo no Yado staff, and although obtaining ingredients was not as easy as usual they utilized their knowledge and experience to provide emergency food distribution services. While an elaborate menu wasn't possible, they worked hard to provide a hot meal as best they could.



Cooking staff distributing emergency food at a shelter in Fukushima Prefecture. They served up Oyako-don (rice topped with chicken and eggs).



かんぽの宿



Kampo no Yado Iwaki's General Manager Sekiba (left) and Chief of General Affairs Miura (right) talk about the situation during the disaster.



A guest room used as a shelter for victims.

Overcoming the hardships and fighting for the region

Feature 5

Stories from post offices in the disaster areas

The setting up of temporary post offices was a big step towards overcoming the various hardships of the disaster and reopening services to customers.

In this section several postmasters of the disaster areas explain about the conditions during the disaster, the responses from customers and the outlook from here on.



Rikuzentakata Post Office Rikuzentakata City, Iwate Prefecture Postmaster Keiichi Sato

When the Great East Japan Earthquake struck, I was working at the Tohoku regional office of Japan Post Network Co., Ltd. in Sendai, and in anticipation of the opening of the temporary post office on April 26, 2011, on April 25 I was made postmaster of Rikuzentakata Post Office. The disaster took the lives of many staff at Rikuzentakata Post Office, including the previous postmaster. The suffering and anxiety of the staff is unimaginable, and on hearing the stories I was fraught with emotion. After the disaster when we restarted post office work at the temporary office, the first thing we did was have a dialogue with the staff (for their emotional care), then afterwards we exchanged talks with staff concerning how to smoothly restart executing our work. While speediness was required in working towards reopening services, staff prioritized the customers and the company before themselves and their families, and I'm very grateful for this.

Rikuzentakata City is a small city with a population of around 24,000, and the central part of the city sustained devastating destruction from the tsunami. Other post offices in the city area were also completely destroyed, and I think the fact that to customers combined with those of these post offices we could keep providing services is something of great significance. Especially I think it's significant that Rikuzentakata Post Office was able to handle services online from when we reopened, whereas temporary offices of banks in the neighborhood had to run their services offline between the limited window of 10:00am to 2:00pm. Our post office had two ATMs setup so that customers could use them smoothly and they were very glad about this.

It's predicted that the total recovery of Rikuzentakata City will take a considerable amount of time, though for the reinstallation of our offices we'd like to cooperate with the community to make every possible effort to be able to conduct our work in the best possible location.



[Right photo]
Rikuzentakata Post Office building.

[Left photo]
The ATMs operated online from the start of the reopening.



[Right photo]
Uniforms with recovery messages printed on them.

[Left photo]
A staff member listens sensitively to some customers.



Sanriku Post Office Ofunato City, Iwate Prefecture Postmaster Tatsuko Kimura

At the moment the earthquake struck there was such strong shaking that I knew this was not a normal earthquake. We heard that the wireless warning system was sending out an alert about a giant tsunami, so thinking "a tsunami will definitely come", we decided to put everything we could inside the vault, lock it and head out to evacuate. At that time, I caught sight of three large parcels that we were taking care of for a student who'd graduated from a local university. I earnestly wanted to somehow get them to the student, so I piled them into the car and headed off to the evacuation area. When I arrived there it was just before the tsunami came. In order to make reliable decisions in the spur of the moment, it's more important than anything else to not only confirm the area of evacuation, but also confirm the route on foot and bring staff there to have them remember it. From this disaster I realized that the main thing above all is to escape, and I also became aware afresh of my crucial responsibility as a postmaster.

Up until the installation of a temporary office was decided upon, I was worried that Sanriku Post Office would be abandoned for a long period of time, and felt anxiety about how to protect the staff and how we could return back to the region.



[Top-left photo]
A large sign to indicate the post office.

[Top-right photo]
Inside the post office.

[Left photo]
Recovery support slogans are hung up inside the post office.

When we restarted work at the temporary office, customers said many gracious things like "I'm glad it's opened up again. I was waiting for it", and "the postmaster has such a nice smile." There were also customers who were worried for myself and the other staff and were brought to tears. I really felt that the existence of our post office relies so much on the customers of the region.

Currently we're in the temporary office, but we're carrying out our work mostly without change from before, and I feel that the inconvenience to the customers has been resolved. From here on I'd like to work hard as best I can to realize a reinstallation of our offices that will please our customers.

[Right photo]
A message board placed at the entrance.

[Left photo]
The display layout clearly and compactly showcases products and services.



Taro Post Office Miyako City, Iwate Prefecture Postmaster Noboru Yamane

On the day of the disaster, because it was an earthquake different to ones we'd experienced before, the staff and I evacuated to higher ground in preparation for the worst case that it'd be a tsunami. Shortly after, the tsunami penetrated into the bay. The tsunami was colored black and I believe was around two times higher than the seawall. The height of the seawall was around ten meters, however as soon as I saw the tsunami I was certain it would surpass it. In an instant the tsunami completely annihilated the central part of the Taro area, and all we could do was watch on helplessly as the post office was destroyed. For a while after the tsunami had hit I just stood there aghast, though the staff and I spent the night helping with the injured and the transporting of supplies.

Between the time from the disaster to the restarting of services through a temporary office, I visited the Taro area to examine the possibilities for mobile post offices and the setting up of the temporary office. When I visited I was very glad to hear from customers who, despite being inconvenienced by our closure, were asking me when we'd reopen and that they wanted to see us reopen soon as they needed our services.

Currently we're borrowing a part of the Miyako City Taro General Offices and have restarted our services. This temporary office is situated in the middle of two temporary housing places, and the location is convenient for the customers. Also when performing different procedures, such as for inheritance, the necessary documents of certification can be issued just from the adjoining counters, and so just one visit is enough to complete the procedures. Furthermore, there's the merit of having close access to information regarding the plan for town recovery.

Since the disaster, the ordinary has become lost from our daily lives, and the experiences of customers have been wide-ranging. We deal with many customers, but to their point of view it's just one-on-one. More than ever before I'd like to continue doing my job keeping in mind that each and every customer is important and worth cherishing.

The recovery of the town is still far ahead, and we wish to reinstall our post office in a place convenient for the people of the region, that's based on the recovery maintenance plan of the community, is in line with the trends of public and financial institutions, and is safe and secure for people to use the services easily. In order to fulfill this, we hope to work in close collaboration with the community.



[Right photo]
Inside the post office.



[Left photo]
The Miyako City Taro General Offices that accommodates the temporary offices of Taro Post Office.



[Right photo]
The site of the original post office, of which remains only a post box pillar and stairs.



[Left photo]
A customer using the post office services. As the temporary office was inside a branch office of the city hall, to the customers it was a convenient spot where a variety of errands could all get done.

Takekoma Post Office Rikuzentakata City, Iwate Prefecture Postmaster Maki Matsuno

What was more of a shock for me than the loss of our post office to the disaster was the loss of our energetic and cheerful customers. As night fell the shaking subsided, and when I laid eyes on the national highway road and post office from up on the high ground that I was on, the landscape I had known was completely changed. My only hope was that I could see all of our staff and we could confirm each other's safety.

When we were building the temporary office I felt that I wanted to create a post office that would make people glad when they saw it.

I thought the temporary office would likely look quite desolate on the outside, so my intention was to liven up the inside with decorations and other things to make it a post office with a bright mood that allows customers to feel the warmth the moment they enter inside. Also, I thought it would be best to make it a place where people could at least momentarily be put at ease as a respite from their bleak circumstances, and so we were careful with our handling of customers and endeavored to give an extra helping word of support along with our normal work. When we did restart work at the temporary office, the customers congratulated us. Though I was in a complicated state of mind, with many people having passed away and some left without their homes, it was good that the lives of our customers were improving little by little, and this made me very glad.



[Right photo]
The building of Takekoma Post Office. On the 2nd floor, the Sales staff of Rikuzentakata Post Office are borrowing space.

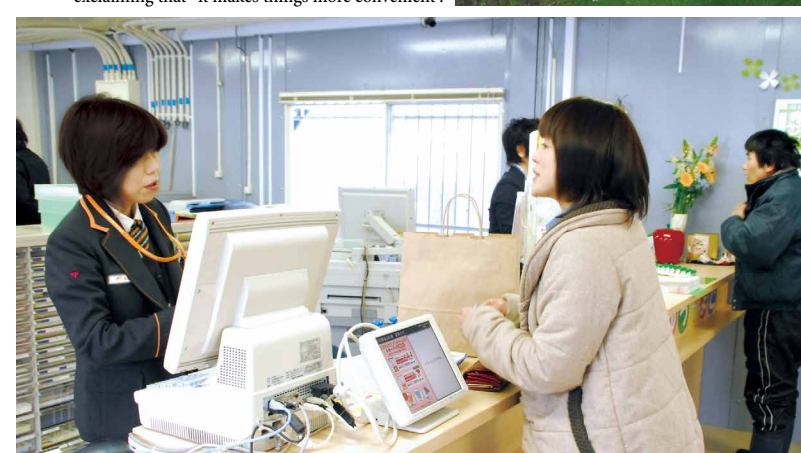


[Left 2 photos]
Decorations inside the post office from an idea by the postmaster.

[Right photo]
A new recovery post box setup in front of the post office building.

[Center photo]
In Rikuzentakata City a single pine tree remains, of which became the motif for the front relief of the recovery post box.

[Bottom photo]
Customers who used Takekoma Post Office welcomed the restart of work at the temporary office, exclaiming that "it makes things more convenient".



Kuwagasaki Post Office Miyako City, Iwate Prefecture Postmaster Hajime Muto

The day of the disaster was a day I had taken off from work, and I was just preparing for final tax returns when I felt extraordinary shaking, and I was sure they'd be a tsunami. So I headed towards Kuwagasaki Post Office, however as the one direct road to the post office was heavily congested and the tsunami had already come, I was unable that day to reach it in the end. Though midway I did come across some of the staff and was glad to see they were safe. That night, being unable to return home, I spent the night awake in Miyako Hinode Post Office (which had escaped disaster as it was on a high place) together with their staff, the staff of my own destroyed post office, and the staff of Miyako Shiyakusho-Mae Post Office. The next day, the roads still weren't in any condition to drive on, so we crossed the mountain behind the post office on foot. The post office building had its roof taken by the tsunami, but the building itself still remained, and we confirmed that documents and the ATMs were still there.

Before the disaster we had around 100 people visiting the post office per day. There were many companies that handled marine products in the area and many of their staff would come for postal services, however as these companies have now faced complete destruction most of their staff don't come anymore. Since the disaster, I felt that we've become more unified with our customers through our mutual hope of recovering the area. Especially as the area that the post office was on is the birthplace of Miyako City, we'd like to do what we can as a post office to ensure that this town prospers and remains into the future.



[Top-right photo]
The letters affixed on to the temporary office were taken from the disaster-struck original building.

[Left photo]
A message of support sent to Kuwagasaki Post Office.



[Right photo]
Inside the post office. Many customers said that the post office, of which offers services linked closely to their lives, such as mailing and saving, was "something we can't live without".

[Left photo]
A sushi shop master who has known Postmaster Muto for 20 years. He said "As someone who runs a business, just having a post office close by is reassuring."

[Bottom photo]
A letter sent to Kuwagasaki Post Office.



The temporary office of Sendai Minami Post Office. On the left side is the counter for savings and insurance. On the right side is the postal counter.

Sendai Minami Post Office Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture Postmaster Fujio Asano

Sendai Minami Post Office is situated in Nagamachi of where the ground has a weak foundation, and with this major earthquake the post office building, of which was built around 44 years ago, was completely destroyed. Thankfully there was no harm to people, but after the disaster the staff were assigned to different places a number of times, and so the days of uncertainty continued. I heard that while the ruined post office building was being removed many customers spoke daily about how they wanted it to come back as soon as possible and were asking us when that day would be. So when we did arrive back here, despite the fact the roads were iced over, many customers rushed to our post office from morning, including some elderly customers, and told me how glad they were.

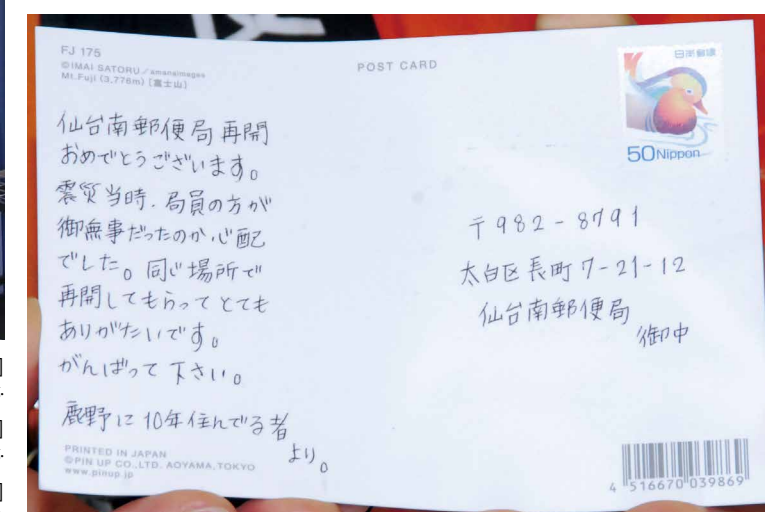
Also we were told by Mayor Okuyama of Sendai City that "the post office is essential for the growth of Nagamachi". At first I thought it was just diplomatic remarks, however customers of Sendai Minami Post Office seemed to feel that the post office being here was essential, and we even got a letter saying "I'm so grateful that the post office was reopened at the same location. In any case, do your best without giving up." Knowing that our customers really were grateful to us brought a tear to my eye. I felt happy to be working at the post office.



[Top-right photo]
Many flowers were sent celebrating the reopening.

[Bottom-right photo]
A letter from a customer congratulating them on the reopening.

[Left photo]
Advertising the reopening along with another staff member.



Shizugawa Post Office Minami-Sanriku Town, Miyagi Prefecture Postmaster Yoshitaka Okajima

On the day of the earthquake a warning went out of a major tsunami, so together with the staff we locked the post office and evacuated to a four-story hotel directly across the road. The tsunami wiped away the post office building in an instant, and the hotel we were in immediately started to fill with water. We led the participants of an elderly people's recreational party, that was taking place in the hotel on the day, up to the higher stories, and eventually we evacuated to the top floor. The water was coming up to our knees.

After first opening up a service counter at the temporary office I believe we were able to resolve some of the inconveniences of customers. There was little point in wishing for the work environment at the temporary office to run as smoothly as it did before, and so I tell staff that we have to accept that, move on and continue our work. Currently, mainly customers who are living in temporary housing are using our services. The customers are very glad about the reopening. They dropped in before we opened to ask "when are you opening", and I really felt that the post office is loved by our customers and that they depend on it. We'll continue to do our best to live up to the reliance they have in us.



[Left photo]
The building of Shizugawa Post Office. Flowers commemorating the opening can also be seen.



[Top-right photo]
The hotel the postmaster and his staff evacuated to when the earthquake occurred (in the back).



[Bottom-right photo]
The temporary office is inside an industrial complex, with many factories surrounding it.

Nobiru Post Office Higashimatsushima City, Miyagi Prefecture Postmaster Yuichi Kikuchi

Before the disaster the number of households that Nobiru Post Office delivered to was 1,600, however now it's dropped to around 600. There are also many customers who are living in temporary housing or who have moved to other towns or cities, and currently I wish most for the re-stabilizing of their lives.

After the disaster, as we needed to prepare for the temporary office, I visited Higashimatsushima City Hall. As a part of the city's recovery plan, the idea was to create a citizen center, fire station and police box in these elementary school grounds, and when I asked if it was okay to also include the post office, the council member willingly gave their approval, and so we were able to set up the temporary office here.

Some of our customers come especially to Nobiru Post Office from far away by car or bicycle. I want to continue to cherish these customers. There aren't any financial institutions at all in this area, and so it would be great in particular for the more elderly customers to use our services to receive their pensions for their daily lives.

From now, through our wish to give the favor back to the region, we'd like to do our best for the reinstallation of our offices.



[Left photo]
Many encouraging messages for recovery can be seen around the disaster-struck post office building.



[Top-right photo]
The temporary offices set up along with other temporary public facilities, such as a police box and fire station.

[Bottom-right photo]
Inside the post office.

Shizugawa Post Office Yamada Town, Iwate Prefecture Postmaster Yoichi Sasaki

After the disaster, I went to visit the post office building and there was debris piled up in front, plus a boat sitting on top of it. I wondered what on earth had happened. My first impression was to ask myself if I was in a dream. Then when I went in the building, what shocked me were two Japan Post Service vehicles that had entered inside – exactly how they had come in or from where I couldn't tell.

The vault had disappeared so the staff and I went looking for it, and found it buried amongst the debris. It was all such a surreal situation, and especially when we were looking for the vault I kept thinking to myself, "What on earth am I doing".

Before the disaster, our services were used by fishermen and employees from fishing companies and also people from neighboring towns as we were on the national highway. Everyday we had from around 300 to 400 customers, however now this has considerably decreased. The town sustained extremely severe damage from the tsunami, and so there were many customers who worried if the post office would return. For the future I have many aspirations for when our office is reinstalled, but for now I plan to do as best as I can here.



[Top-left photo]
Inside the post office.

[Bottom-left photo]
A delivery center was set up right next door.

[Right photo]
A message posted at the entrance of the temporary office.

Matsukawa Port Post Office Soma City, Fukushima Prefecture Postmaster Ryoji Araki

On the day of the disaster, the ATM serviceperson happened to come for doing maintenance, and while they were working on the ATM with its cover open, the earthquake struck. We learnt from the radio that a major tsunami alert had been sent out and we discussed with the staff that we'd have to evacuate, however the cover of the ATM wasn't able to close anymore, perhaps due to being deformed by the shaking of the earthquake. Finally, we were able to close it, and just as we evacuated outside, the tsunami was heading in from the north, swallowing buildings in its path.

Before the disaster there were four financial institutions in the areas of Matsukawa and Haragama, but they were all completely destroyed and washed away by the tsunami, so all of their services were out. After the disaster, until the temporary office opened, when I met customers of the local area they'd ask me "When will the post office reopen?" and I truly felt regretful about it.

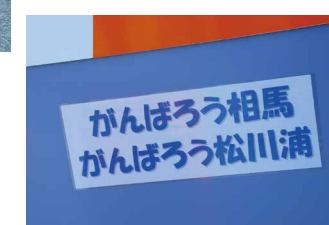
Right after work restarted at the temporary office, many of the customers that came in were those who'd had their homes washed away or had lost family, and so all of us staff made efforts to first listen to their stories and sensitively handle consultations about inheritance.



[Left photo]
The temporary office was set up in the parking lot of a barbershop, thanks to the kindness of a local resident.

[Top-right photo]
Inside the post office.

[Bottom-right photo]
A message of support affixed to the outside wall of the temporary office.





Overcoming an unprecedented disaster

The Great East Japan Earthquake stole away the lives, possessions and livelihoods of many people. The services provided by Japan Post Group carry important roles that support the lives of our customers, and it's our mission to respond swiftly to their call because of the trust they lay in us, especially in times of emergency like this earthquake disaster.

This trust in our group is built from the thoughts of each of our friends who regretfully fell victim to this disaster without ever forgetting their mission and sense of responsibility, and this must be etched into our minds and conveyed into the future so as to never be forgotten. With this disaster, we are freshly aware of our role as a total living support enterprise group, and that because we are an enterprise essential to the lives of customers and the region, we must strive to put in further efforts from now.

Japan Post Group,
A Record of the Great East Japan Earthquake,
Bonds

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Japan Post Holdings Co., Ltd.
Corporate Planning Department
Public Relations Division
〒100-8798
1-3-2 Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo
TEL: (03) 3504-4411 (representative)
URL: <http://www.japanpost.jp/>

