

Disasters: A Safety Guide –Typhoons and Rainstorms–

1. Prologue

Every year, Japan is affected by frequent typhoons and torrential rainstorms.

Typhoons are tropical storms formed in the northwestern Pacific. There were 39 typhoons in 1967, the worst year since 1951. The lightest year was 1998, with 16. In an average year, 27 typhoons are formed, of which 11 approach the Japanese archipelago and three actually strike land.

In 2004, ten typhoons directly struck Japan, the highest number for any year on record. They caused heavy damage, including deaths and injuries, in many parts of the country.

A torrential rain is a non-typhoon storm that drops at least five centimeters, or two inches, of rain an hour, causing near-zero visibility. During 1998 there were more than 400 torrential rainstorms in Japan.

These dangerous events are a fact of life, and we all need to know how to protect ourselves when they strike. Here we will acquaint you with disaster prevention measures in Japan, and also inform you how to respond if a typhoon or torrential rainstorm hits your area.

2. At time like this... Go to nearest disaster shelter

Every community in Japan has an established system for disaster preparedness. If a disaster strikes, your local government will initiate rescue operations, including the provision of food and drinking water for those who need it. Schools or other public buildings will be used as shelters for people whose homes or neighborhoods are unsafe. Please visit your town or ward office at your earliest convenience to obtain information about disaster shelters and evacuation routes, so you will know where to go if there is a disaster.

3. At time like this... Call rescue

In case of fire or personal injury, or any other emergency, pick up the phone and dial 1-1-9.

After dialing 1-1-9, you will be asked if there is a fire, or if an ambulance is needed.

KAJI means fire.

Q-Q means emergency, and Q-Q-sha means ambulance.

Please respond by saying either KAJI or Q-Q. Then tell the operator your address, your name, and the number of the phone you are calling from.

It may be convenient to write out your address and phone number in Japanese, and place them on the wall next to your telephone, so you can stay calm and efficient in case of an emergency.

If you are using a public telephone, first push the red button, then dial 1-1-9.

If you have difficulty explaining the situation in Japanese, try to find someone nearby to help you.

In a large-scale disaster such as an earthquake, it may be impossible to reach the 1-1-9 operator. Also, fire and rescue teams may not be able to respond quickly because of damage to transportation routes or the large volume of calls. Therefore, it is up to each person to be prepared, and to know what to do in case a disaster strikes.

There are ten common-sense rules for what to do in the event of a typhoon or torrential rainstorm. The information presented here may help to save your life.

4. Prompt evacuation can save lives

Rule 1:

Prompt evacuation can save lives.

Orderly evacuation was credited with saving many lives in September 2004, when Typhoon 18 destroyed much of the town of Sanyo-cho in Yamaguchi Prefecture.

Unlike an earthquake, which comes without warning, a typhoon or other storm can be predicted hours in advance. Please pay close attention to official warnings and evacuation advisories in your area.

Up-to-the-minute typhoon information is available in English on the Japan MEteorological Agency's website.

http://www.jma.go.jp/jma/jma-eng/jma-center/rsmc-hp-pub-eg/RSMC_HP.htm

5. Watch for physical premonitions of disaster

Rule 2:

Watch for physical premonitions of disaster.

Landslides and debris flows cause about half of the deaths that occur each year in Japan from natural disasters. In many cases, a major land shift is preceded by small but observable phenomena. For example, the river level drops even though it is raining, or underground rumblings can be heard, or small stones roll down a hillside. Such early warning signs do not always occur, but you should always be alert to changes in your everyday environment.

6. Stay away from riverbanks and the seashore

Rule 3:

Stay away from riverbanks and the seashore.

In 2004, as in other years, several people were swept to their deaths during typhoons by high waves or rushing rivers. Never approach a river or the sea during a storm, as it is extremely dangerous. Also, rivers can remain dangerous well after the rain has stopped.

7. If you must be outdoors, beware of flying objects

Rule 4:

If you must be outdoors, beware of flying objects.

Heavy winds can turn any object into a dangerous missile. During typhoons in 2004, a bicyclist was killed by a falling branch, and a pedestrian was killed by a flying signboard. Falling roof tiles are another common danger during heavy storms, as are downed electric wires. The best thing is to stay indoors in a safe location.

8. Don't try to control damage while the storm is raging

Rule 5:

Don't try to control damage while the storm is raging.

It may be tempting to make immediate repairs or reinforcements, but please wait until the storm is over. Some of the people who died in the typhoons of 2004 were swept off roofs while they were trying to make repairs. A typhoon may cause a sudden blast of wind even when it is far away, and the danger increases greatly as the storm approaches. Rather than last-minute measures, the best policy is to gradually reinforce roofs and walls during good weather.

9. Basements are especially dangerous

Rule 6:

Basements are especially dangerous.

During a torrential rain in Fukuoka in June 1999, the basement of an office building was suddenly inundated and a worker was killed. A month later the same thing happened in a Tokyo building. Shopping malls and parking garages may also have underground levels. Although it may seem secure during our normal daily routine, any space below ground level can become a dangerous flood trap during a heavy storm.

10. Stop driving-immediately

Rule 7:

Stop driving-immediately.

When the city of Nagasaki was flooded in 1982, some 20,000 vehicles were damaged; 20 drivers died as their vehicles were dragged underwater or buried by landslides.

In 2004 during Typhoon 16, vehicles were inundated or blown into rivers in various locations, causing several deaths.

It is extremely dangerous to drive during a major storm. Brakes will not work when tires are half underwater, and the vehicle may be swept away when the water level is 10 to 20 centimeters, or 4 to 8 inches, above the bottom of the doors.

If you are driving, move immediately to higher flat land, park your vehicle and leave it until the storm is over. Wherever your car is parked, move it out of the roadway if possible. Leave the key in the ignition so it can easily be moved out of the path of emergency vehicles during relief operations.

11. Beware of manholes and ditches in flooded areas

Rule 8:

Beware of manholes and ditches in flooded areas.

Of the seven people killed by a torrential storm in Kochi in September 1998, two stepped into manholes that had been uncovered by water pressure.

In 2004, a man drowned in an irrigation ditch during torrential rains in Fukui.

When the ground is hidden by floodwaters, it is not safe for walking. If you must walk, use a stick as a probe.

12. The elderly and the disabled need your assistance

Rule 9:

The elderly and the disabled need your assistance.

When floods struck Niigata, Fukushima and Fukui Prefectures in July 2004, almost all of the people who died were senior citizens who were trapped in their homes. In an

emergency, please remember to help elderly or disabled neighbors to safety.

13. Know your local danger spots

Rule 10:

Know your local danger spots.

Familiarize yourself in advance with the topography of your neighborhood. A flood hazard map is available at the town office, showing likely water depths in the event of a major storm. Learn the locations of high land, emergency shelters, and evacuation routes.

The town of Koriyama distributed a new flood hazard map in early 1998. When torrential rains struck six months later, the residents who had studied that map were able to evacuate more quickly than those who had not. Knowledge provides confidence, as well as awareness and safety.

14. Epilogue

No one in Japan is immune to the disasters that may accompany a typhoon or a torrential rainstorm. Remembering these 10 safety rules may save your life. The most important thing is to take preventive steps before disaster strikes. Hindsight has taught us time and again that immediate evacuation would have prevented deaths and injuries. We must be humble in the face of nature, and take her dangers seriously.

Please learn what to do if a serious storm strikes, and when it does strike, do not hesitate to take all appropriate precautions.