Operational Essentials of

Disaster Response Headquarters

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Purpose of this booklet

In recent years, large-scale disasters have occurred with increasing frequency, and it is likely that many people have experienced confusion in the central functions that oversee disaster response activities each time a disaster occurs.

This booklet summarizes the key points for local governments, disaster response organizations, and enterprises in Japan when operating a disaster response headquarters, with the goal of ensuring that emergency response and regular practice drills are conducted smoothly and effectively. This booklet can also be used as a reference by community based organizations such as neighborhood associations and volunteer groups, etc. in the operation of evacuation centers. We hope that you will find this useful.

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1. Basic Principles of Disaster Response

The following is a broad and basic approach that can be used as a guide when making decisions about disaster response activities. Although there will be differences in the nature and extent of the disaster, the location where it occurs, the time of day and season, and the goals, objectives, and methods of the relief activities conducted in response, this basic approach can be applied in all situations.

Basic Principle 1: Victims First

Prioritizing the needs and safety of victims is vital when providing disaster relief. In particular, victims' physical and emotional stress must be minimized by understanding and responding to their needs in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.

Basic Principle 2: Provision of Comprehensive Support

Disaster victims are likely to come from diverse backgrounds and vary widely in terms of age, gender, social status, economic situation, physical ability, nationality, language, religion, political beliefs, etc. In addition, there may be some victims for whom the needs cannot be met by a single method of support due to a combination of factors. Furthermore, in recent years, in addition to immediate disaster deaths, medium- to long-term disaster-

related deaths have become an issue.

Therefore, when responding to disasters, it is important to respect and consider the diversity of each individual victim and to provide comprehensive support so that no one is left behind.

Basic Principle 3: Ensuring the Safety and Care for Disaster Relief Responders

As with disaster victims, it is essential to support, care for, and ensure the safety of responders.

The leader of the organization must always consider whether the responders are receiving the necessary and appropriate information, tools, materials, and supplies. Because of this attitude on the part of leaders, supporters will be able to safely provide higher quality assistance to disaster victims and they will also feel more motivated.

Basic Principle 4: Establishing a Collaborative System with External Partners

In this context, external partners refer to organizations, groups, or individuals who work with the disaster response headquarters to respond to disaster victims' needs. They are national and local governments, public organizations such as the Red Cross, Social Welfare Councils, and DMATs, as well as enterprises, groups, organizations, and individual volunteers.

Collaboration with external partners may be temporary or may

lead to the development of long-term relationships. In areas affected by the disaster, relief workers and employees may also be victims of the disaster; therefore, assistance from outside the affected area is necessary to facilitate relief activities.

When forming alliances with external partners, it is important to establish a relationship of equality on the basis of mutual understanding and respect, and share goals for planned collaboration and cooperative action.

In addition, external partners should be involved in a way that reduces the burden placed on local supported people (beneficiaries) and preserves their dignity.

Basic Principle 5: The Beginning and the End are Key

When interacting with disaster victims and affected areas, first impressions (beginning) and last impressions (end) are important. Building cooperative relationships with the local community, getting off to a good start, and surviving the first 72 hours, which are critical to saving lives, are essential to conducting highly effective activities.

In addition, the end of well-planned relief efforts will leave a lasting impression on many people as an evaluation of the individual, event, or organization; therefore, it is important to be courteous.

Basic Principle 6: Building Consensus

Consensus building in this context refers to a situation in which the positive goal of supporting disaster victims is shared by all those involved in disaster response, and does not imply that the opinions of individual supporters are all accepted.

To support disaster victims, all responders should work together to find ways to meet disaster victims' needs while respecting each other.

Basic Principle 7: Data-Driven Decision-Making

In disaster relief, it is important to base planning and decision-making on data and analysis. To become more effective and efficient, continuously update disaster and on-site information and use the data to improve the way in which support is provided.

Basic Principle 8: Effective Use of Resources

Disaster relief efforts cannot be accomplished without resources such as people, goods, money, information, and time. If these resources are not effectively used, they will be wasted; therefore, it is important to make effective use of these limited resources to help disaster victims.
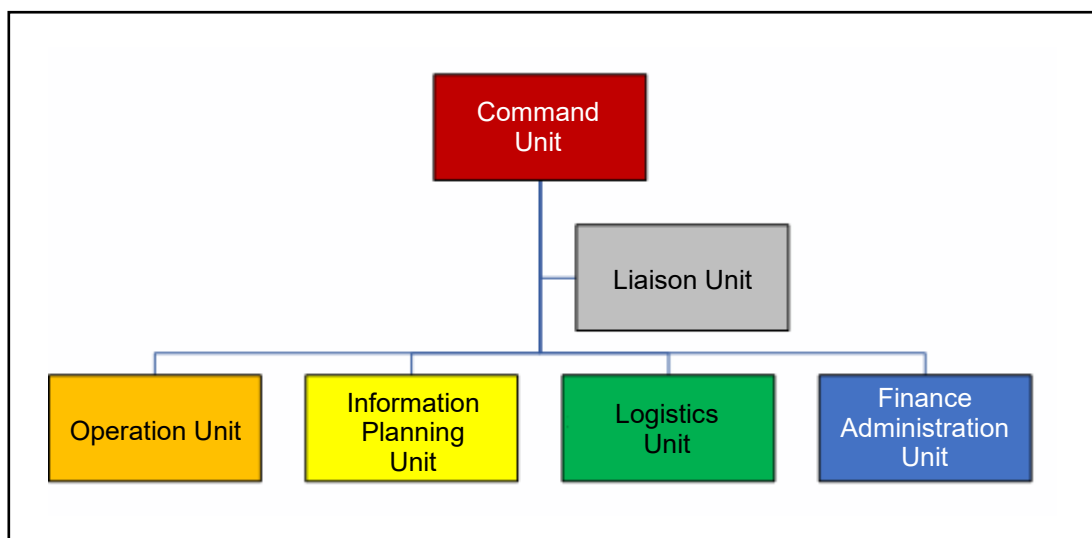
2. Organization of Disaster Response Headqarters

To effectively and efficiently manage and share information about disaster relief efforts, relevant organizations should establish a "task force." The basic structure of a disaster response headquarters, divided into six units, is shown below.

Sample Organization Chart 1
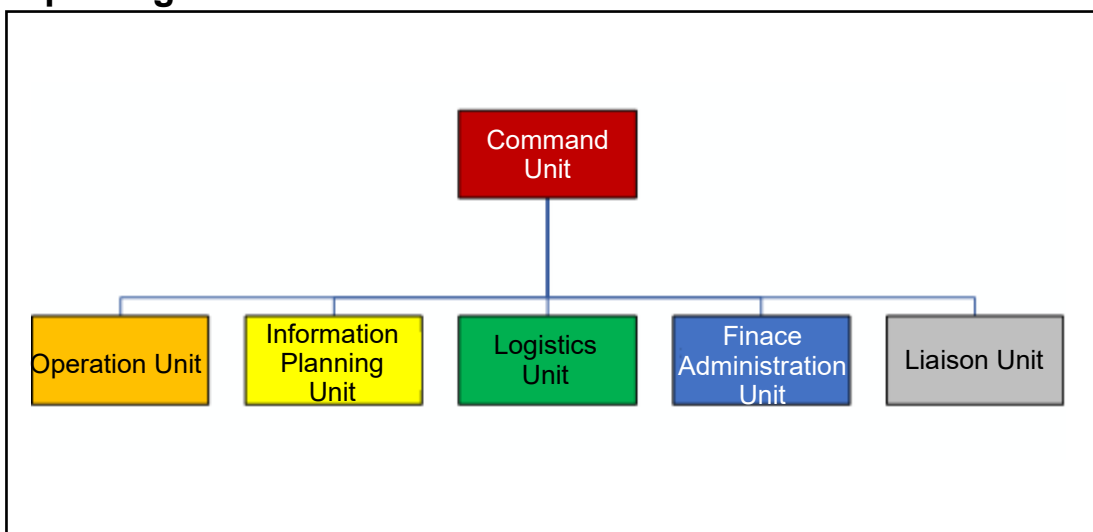
Sample Organization Chart 2

Each unit is responsible for the roles shown in (1) to (6) below. Each unit should have a unit leader. In the case of small-scale activities, etc., it is acceptable for one person to serve as the leader of several units or for a unit leader to also serve as a staff member.

An adequate number of staff members should also be assigned to assist unit leaders. The number of staff should be increased or decreased as necessary in response to changes in the scope of activities.

(1) Command Unit: "Responsibility, Decisions, Watchfulness"

The Command Unit is responsible for the overall management of disaster relief activities. To maintain overall control, other units are assigned tasks to support the Command Unit.

a. Ensure the safety of all staff members and strive to prevent disaster-related stress.

b. Clearly define disaster response priorities and the goals to be achieved during the response period.

c. Identify and prioritize the issues in daily activities and develop specific strategies to achieve the goals in accordance with the priorities.

d. Track the activities of all units and monitor their proper functioning.

(2) Operation Unit: "Core of Relief Activities"

The Operation Unit is at the core of disaster relief and is responsible for a wide range of activities depending on the disaster, including the opening and operation of evacuation centers, distribution of goods and food, disaster medical care, psychological care for disaster victims, and support for people with disabilities and other special needs.

The responsibilities of this unit are as follows.

a. Properly assess the on-site situation.

b. Suggest improvements, if necessary, to the assumptions made in the planning phase.

c. Develop and execute plans to accomplish the **priorities** and objectives for activities established by the Command Unit, using on-site situation assessment and planning information.

d. Calculate the amount of **resources** required to obtain the results.

e. Determine the needs in the affected area and develop forecasts and plans.

f. Use internal and external **resources** to support activities as required.

g. Strive to prevent disaster stress not only for disaster victims, but also for staff members engaged in on-site activities.

(3) Information Planning Unit: "Wisdom, Foresight"

The Information Planning Unit supports all operations by preparing and compiling documents that establish priorities, objectives, **expected outcomes, strategies, tactics**, and work assignments. The Information Planning Unit collects and provides information about the affected area, including the progress of operations, by visualizing data using a variety of tools, including not only traditional media but also social media, pictures, images, maps, and geographic information systems (GIS).

a. Perform impact, preliminary, and detailed damage assessments.

b. Gather and distribute information on the status, communicate the contents of the projected plan to leaders, and support the appropriate allocation of **resources**.

c. Compare and analyze the contents of the plan and actual operations in terms of support provision.

d. Document the **Detailed Activity Plan, Field Activity Plan,** and **Support Delivery Plan**.

e. Support the development of future plans that anticipate the execution of tasks beyond the scope of existing plans.

(4) Logistics Unit: "The Power Behind the Scenes"

The Logistics Unit provides the following **resources** to ensure that disaster relief activities conducted by the Operation Unit under the comprehensive guidance of the Command Unit are executed smoothly and sufficiently.

> - Personnel
> - Equipment
> - Supplies
> - Vehicles
> - Technology

The Logistics Unit is responsible for securing, coordinating, and maintaining the **resources** required to execute the **Support Delivery Plan**.
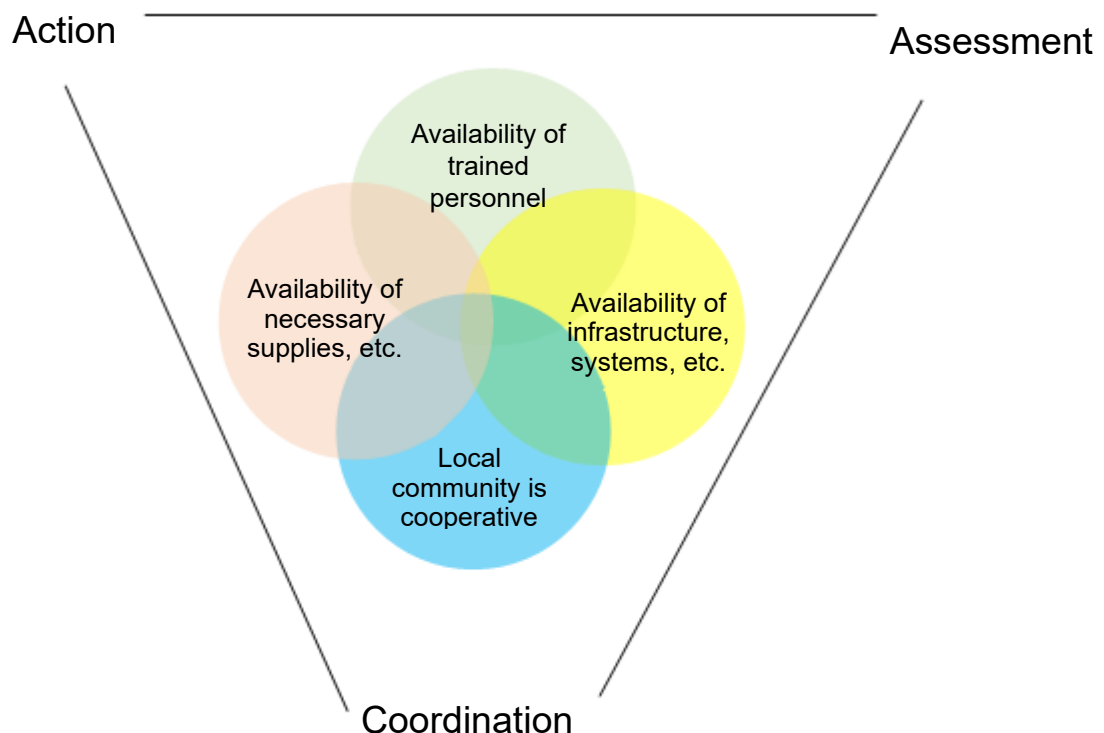
The Logistics Unit does not determine operational requirements but is responsible for securing and maintaining the **resources** necessary to meet operational requirements. The Logistics Unit does not have the authority to deny or change requests for operational support, and if necessary, it must always make a decision in conjunction with the leader or Command Unit, etc.

It should be noted that the management of human resources as part of logistical support includes the advance preparation of disaster stress prevention measures and the provision of appropriate training opportunities, as well as post-relief care.

(5) Finance Administration Unit: "Calm and Centered"

The Finance Administration Unit provides advice and guidance to each unit, calling for compliance with rules on document management and financial matters.

> a. Negotiations and monitoring related to contracts.
> b. Monitor activity budgets and expenditures and improve cost efficiency to ensure that financial resources for supporting beneficiaries are used to the maximum extent possible.
> c. Provide point of contact for compensation for losses (injuries, illnesses, and property damage) incurred through response activities.
> d. Appropriately manage documents created in the course of disaster response.

**Model of Elements Required for Immediate Response to Disasters**

Action

Assessment

Availability of trained personnel

Availability of necessary supplies, etc.

Availability of infrastructure, systems, etc.

Local community is cooperative

Coordination

(6) Liaison Unit: "Facilitating External Relations"

The Liaison Unit is responsible for the following tasks and plays an important role in recent situations where multiple entities work together in the affected areas.

a. Seek support and cooperation from external organizations.

b. Communicate consistent messages as an organization to external stakeholders, such as the general public and the media.

c. Act as a coordinator at all levels, including the national and prefectural disaster response headquarters, as needed, to dispatch personnel and coordinate activities.

d. Organize the information to be communicated to management.

e. Identify and maintain communication with highly affected areas.

f. Convert data collected from multiple sources into useful and meaningful information to support more accurate assessment of the situation.

g. Support external fundraising efforts when necessary.

h. Build positive relationships with the contributors.

i. Provide expertise and information to external cooperating organizations, etc.

At the actual affected site, the organizational structure should be formed as follows, for example, and should be adjusted flexibly according to the situation.
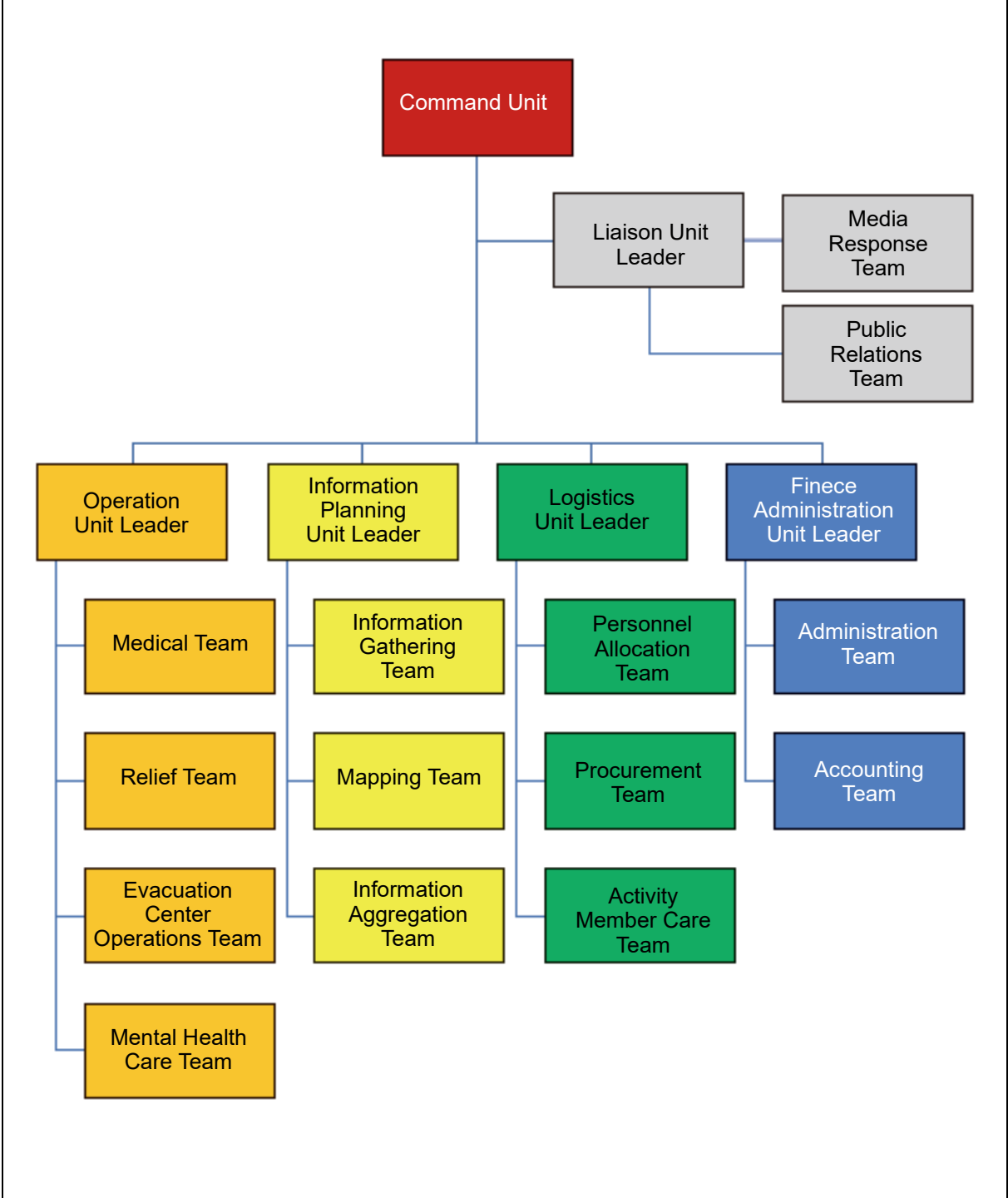
3. Operation of Disaster Reponse Headquaeters

The operation of a disaster response headquarters should proceed in accordance with the seven steps described below. When proceeding with operations based on the following steps, consider the following **PDCA cycle**: Plan (plan), Do (execute), Check (measure, assess), and Act (countermeasures, improvement).

(1) Identify the initial priorities, goals, and projected plans.

In situations where a disaster is imminent or has just occurred, use existing disaster relief activity plans, information from local residents, storage locations for emergency resources, hazard maps and other maps, and information obtained at the time to tentatively identify initial **priorities**, **goals** (actions required to achieve priorities), and **projected plans** (contents and duration of various support required for relief activities).

(2) Following a site assessment, improve the accuracy of the priorities, goals, and projected plans.

The first task in disaster response is to understand what is happening. This process is called "**site assessment**." This allows the leader to set **priorities** and identify, secure, and

manage **resources** that are lacking in a disaster.

By analyzing the various information obtained over time, the accuracy of the **priorities**, **goals,** and **projected plans** identified at the outset should be increased as much as possible.

In some cases, a complete review may be necessary.

The following are some specific points to consider.

a. What is the type of the disaster?

b. When did the damage occur, or when will it occur in the future?

c. Where did the damage occur?

d. Who was affected and who might be affected in the future?

e. What efforts are being made by external supporters, and what kind of relief activities are expected?

f. What kind of support do victims need and to what extent?

g. When, where, and how should appropriate support be provided?

h. What will the impact on infrastructure be?

i. What concerns have already arisen or are likely to arise (e.g., road closures, impending weather deterioration, possibility of aftershocks, etc.)?

(3)   Formulate a Detailed Activity Plan.

To improve the accuracy of the plan and achieve the set **priorities** and **goals**, identify the following three items necessary for disaster relief activities and formulate a **Detailed Activity Plan**.

- **Strategy** (the methods used to achieve priorities and goals)
- **Expected outcomes** (the results of actions taken in disaster relief activities)
- The quality and quantity of **resources** (people, goods, money, information, time, etc., required to achieve the strategy and expected outcomes)

(4)   Formulate a Support Delivery Plan.

Formulate a **Support Delivery Plan** based on the **priorities, goals, planning assumptions, strategies, and expected outcomes** identified in the previous steps. The following considerations are necessary when formulating a Support Delivery Plan.

a. Number of disaster victims who require support

b. Number and type of required equipment

c. Number of required staff members and their skills

d. Supplies and materials required

e. Unique characteristics of the disaster that may affect

support provision

f. Type and level of support provided by external partners

g. Method and duration of support provision

(5) Formulate a Field Activity Plan.

The **Field Activity Plan** should be formulated by dividing the activity period into specific periods.

The **Field Activity Plan** for each of these periods should address the following two items.

- **Tactics** (concrete actions to be conducted in a specific place and time frame in order to achieve the expected outcomes based on the strategy)
- **Specific work assignment for staff** (specifying and allocating resources to support individual tactics)

Once these plans are in place, it is time to move on to actual support activities.

However, the role of the disaster response headquarters is not yet over.

There is more to come.

(6)   Receive reports on the status of support provision.

Receive qualitative and quantitative reports on the support provided. Ensure regular reporting of support provided throughout the duration of the activities.

(7)   Make data-based decisions and adjust plans.

Use the content of the support provision report to make data-based judgments about its effectiveness and efficiency and evaluate the results of the support provision considering the expected outcomes.

The leader should analyze the quantitative and qualitative data based on regular reports and repeat the process of adjusting and revising the **Field Activity Plan** as needed.

In addition, the **Detailed Activity Plan**, **Support Delivery Plan**, and support system for the personnel involved may also be revised as necessary.

Flow of operations of disaster Response Headquarters

*The Support Delivery Plan is subject to revision based on data-driven decision-making.

Complete the Support Delivery Plan

Formulate a Detailed Activity Plan and identify the strategy and expected outcomes.

Formulate a Field Activity Plan and decide on tactics and work assignments.

Identify the situation

Receive support provision reports

Making data-based decisions and adjust plans.

If there are any changes to the priorities, goals, assumptions in the plan, strategies, or expected outcomes, an additional Detailed Activity Plan should be formulated as necessary.

Formulate a Detailed Activity Plan and identify the strategy and expected outcomes.

Formulate a Field Activity Plan and decide on tactics and work assignments.

Identify the situation

Receive support provision reports

Making data-based decisions and adjust plans.

Disaster occurs

Identify the initial priorities, goals, and assumptions in the plan.

Based on site assessment and unique characteristics of the disaster, improve the accuracy of priorities, goals, and projected plans.

4. Practical Points to Keep in Mind

(1)   Span of control and delegation of authority

The span of control for management or supervisory positions should be 3–5 staff members per person. In the case of large-scale disaster relief activities, it is preferable to limit the number to 7 staff members per person.

If the number of staff members exceeds 7, consider setting up a new subordinate organization and delegating authority.

When considering the span of control, all factors, including the type of disaster, the nature of operations, the number of victims, the location of human resources and supplies, and the distance to the affected area, must be considered.

(2)   Work shifts

The basic rule is that no person should work more than 12 consecutive hours on any task. If it is necessary to continue working beyond this time, ensure that a replacement is assigned and that a handover is made so that the person can get proper rest. Working beyond 12 hours can lead to fatigue and impair the ability to make calm and rational decisions.

(3) At the end of the activities

Express your gratitude to all the staff involved in the relief activities and thank them for their hard work.

If necessary, store, return, or dispose of supplies, systems/equipments, and vehicles.

(4) Compile a record of the relief activities

For future reference and to prepare for the next disaster, an activity log should be compiled.

In recent years, although small-scale, localized disasters have been frequent, large-scale disasters have also occurred with a low probability of occurrence.

Each disaster prevention organization attempts to stockpile necessary supplies and make plans, etc., but to conduct a smooth and effective emergency response, developing human resources with disaster response expertise and multi-organizational cooperation, including among the government, prefectures, municipalities, and private and volunteer organizations, is becoming increasingly important.

In addition to acquiring knowledge about disaster prevention, it is advisable to actively engage in training and practical exercises in peacetime to promote inter-organizational cooperation and build relationships based on mutual trust.

Definitions of Terms Used in This Booklet

● Expected outcomes:

　The results of actions taken during disaster relief activities.

● Goals:

Actions required to achieve priorities.

● Strategy:

The methods used to achieve the priorities and goals.

● Tactics:

Concrete actions to be taken at specific locations and times as directed to achieve expected outcomes based on strategy.

● Resources:

People, goods, money, information, time, etc., required to achieve the strategy and expected outcomes.

● PDCA cycle:

An iterative hypothesis testing process for improving management quality consisting of the following steps: Plan (plan), Do (execute), Check (measure, assess), and Act (countermeasures, improvement).