

## **Public Awareness of Disaster Risks through Education**

**Mr. Shinji Ito**

Supervisor, Educational Planning Office, Hyogo Prefectural Board of Education,  
Japan

Prior to the Great Hanshin–Awaji Earthquake, the disaster prevention education conducted in Hyogo Prefecture was always a part of safety education, such as “traffic safety”, “living safety” or “disaster safety”, similar to what was done in other prefectures in Japan. Earthquake disaster drills were also practised, but with a focus on the potential for fire in the aftermath of an earthquake.

January 17, 1995 (*Heisei 7*), 5:46 a.m. The Earthquake that hit the southern part of Hyogo Prefecture caused devastating damage to those living in the Kobe, Hanshin and Awaji areas.

It took a heavy toll in human lives, including schoolchildren and their guardians. Of the 2,009 school buildings, 389 were used as shelters, to which 180,227 people were evacuated. Schools, whether designated as shelters or not, were inundated with evacuees. Without any published guidelines, those schools that were opened to evacuees had to be run completely by improvising according to the demands of each moment.

In the wake of the experiences born out of the Earthquake, the Hyogo Prefectural Board of Education established a Committee for Inspecting Disaster Management Education, in order to make the most of its experiences to promote this type of education in Hyogo. In the Committee, the following tasks were discussed:

1. Roles of schools in the event of disasters and enhancement of disaster prevention system.
2. Disaster prevention education at schools.
3. Mental health care for schoolchildren.

The Committee for Inspecting Disaster Management Education presented proposals based on three pillars, each of which has a particular focus:

1. Roles of schools in the event of disasters and enhancement of disaster prevention system:  
Focus on roles of schools in the event of disasters
2. Strengthening of disaster prevention education at schools: Focus on promotion of “New Disaster Prevention Education”
3. Mental health care: Focus on expansion of mental health care

“New Disaster Prevention Education” is aimed at accomplishing three goals:

1. Acquiring disaster prevention literacy to protect oneself against disasters.
2. Acquiring knowledge about local disaster history and natural disaster mechanisms.
3. Promoting a spirit of volunteerism and harmony.

Hyogo Prefecture decided to call this educational program, the combination of this information and spirit, the “New Disaster Prevention Education”.

Unlike the pre-quake disaster prevention education, designed and implemented as safety education, we thought any program of education that was to benefit from what we had learned should be aimed at helping children appreciate the beauty of the volunteer activities of the people who spontaneously joined forces at that time, as well as the aspects of life that people share in common. It is education directed at helping children consider the ways of being and living as a human being, a focus we believe can be applied to all other areas, including school subjects, special activities and moral education.

Hyogo Prefectural Board of Education has developed a series of supplementary reading material for disaster prevention education, entitled “Living for Tomorrow”, in five versions for kindergarten through high school, to distribute to schools and kindergartens throughout the prefecture. In addition, it has also published every fiscal year since the earthquake various other materials for

distribution to schools and other institutions. These include: a summary booklet of “New Disaster Prevention Education”, a disaster prevention manual for schools, an instruction manual to understand and heal the psychological scars of disaster-stricken children, and sample lessons in disaster prevention education.

However, once a disaster occurs, schools are filled with evacuees, turning them into places for living, not education. In such an environment, schoolchildren learn many things. The Hyogo Prefectural Board of Education published its Disaster Prevention Manual for Schools in 1998.

The Board has worked on the development of manuals for disaster measures and operation of shelters, based on their reflections on having had to grope their way through action without benefit of any manual.

It is clear from the fact that water reservoirs were built at each school to be used for fire-prevention that schools have been positioned as first-line disaster-prevention facilities since early times. Even today, it is mandatory for many primary and junior high schools to keep water in their pools for reasons beyond swimming instruction: it is also intended for water storage for fire prevention.

In order to enhance the disaster-prevention function of schools in light of what we have learned from the Earthquake, and recognizing the role of schools as the core of the safety and security of the community during a disaster, we must establish secure places where local residents can evacuate.

Various kinds of disaster prevention equipment are installed in school buildings. We have introduced, for example, belts to prevent TVs from overturning, attachments for securing lockers, and attachments to prevent cabinets from overturning or moving.

In addition to the installation of such equipment, should schools be required to serve as shelters in a disaster, we are currently developing a system to assign faculty members to help with the operation of the shelters for a certain period

of time.

Shelters are in principle administered by the local municipalities. However, in an actual disaster municipal officers cannot handle everything involved in establishing shelters by themselves. This is why we are planning to assign school faculty, who are familiar with the local community and have met its residents, to work at shelters, so that their operation may proceed smoothly.

Aiming to make the best use of our experience and to reciprocate the vast amount of assistance we received from other prefectures at the time of Great Hanshin–Awaji Earthquake, in April 2000 we established the Emergency and Rescue Team by school staff in Hyogo (EARTH). Members of EARTH have provided support to the school shelters in the area damaged by the eruption of Mount Usu in Hokkaido and psychological care for the children in the quake–stricken schools in western Tottori Prefecture. They have also participated in seminars for school faculty and local disaster prevention drills to share what we have learned from the Earthquake.

When a school is used as a shelter, various problems arise from using the locale as a place for both for education and living. While the original function of schools is to provide a healthy place for children to study and play, they also fulfill another capacity. One aspect of the school, which has been recognized as the core of the community in Japan, is to be a hub of safety and security for communities. In the hope that local residents as well as children will feel a sense of security in their lives, the members of the school faculties in Hyogo Prefecture are undertaking the expansion of the “New Disaster Prevention Education Program”.