

- Disaster Damage Report by Typhoon Rusa in S. Korea -

In one single day (from Aug. 30 to Sept. 1, 2002), Typhoon Rusa devastated the middle and eastern coast areas of the Korean peninsula. It was the severest natural disaster in the modern Korean history causing 217 deaths, 29 missing, US\$ 4.3 billion property damage as of Sept. 30, 2002. More than 27 thousand buildings and 31 thousand ha of agricultural area were inundated.

Most of the casualties have been caused by slope failures including landslides, and flash floods. Types of damage include local and/or small river overflow due to the insufficient flow channel area, urban lowland inundation due to the lack of pumping capacity, and failures of cut-slope and natural terrain. The highest daily precipitation was reported as 870.5 mm, which is about two third of average annual precipitation of Korea, in Gang-Neung City of Gang-Won Province. In addition to this record-breaking precipitation, reckless development was deemed to be one of the major factors that increase disaster vulnerability or susceptibility in urban area.

The Korean government amended the Natural Disaster Countermeasures Act to found the ground of "Special Disaster Area" declaration right after the Typhoon Rusa. On Sept. 13, 2002 the government declared all severely damaged counties (Myun) as Special Disaster Area, which enables the government to support the damaged more rapidly using more funds. On Sept. 27, 2002 a comprehensive recovery plan has been disseminated to the local governments for the timely recovery processes. The number and amount of volunteers and donations were also record-breaking.

The Korean government is now pursuing several improvement of its disaster management system. A task force is set up under the Office of the Prime Minister for a comprehensive flood mitigation countermeasures planning. Also, the government tries to introduce natural disaster insurance program. To mitigate the risk increased by various developments, the Disaster Impact Assessment, which has been put in force since 1996, was decided to be strengthened.

Dugkeun Park, Ph.D.
Senior Analyst
National Institute for Disaster Prevention
Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs
253-42, 6th Floor, Gongdeok-Dong, Mapo-Ku,
Seoul, 121-719, KOREA