Department of State Travel Alert for Japan

From U.S. Department of State
Bureau of Consular Affairs

The Department of State alerts U.S. citizens to the situation in Japan in the aftermath of the 8.9 earthquake that struck northern Japan March 11. U.S. citizens should avoid travel to Japan at this time. This Travel Alert for Japan provides updated information on planned power outages, the evacuation of areas near nuclear power facilities in Fukushima, and the likelihood of further aftershocks and tsunamis. This Travel Alert expires April 1.

The Department of State requests all non-emergency official U.S. government personnel defer travel to Japan and urges U.S. citizens to avoid tourism and non-essential travel to Japan at this time. Temporary shortages of water and food supplies may occur in affected areas of Japan due to power and transportation disruptions. Telephone services have also been disrupted in affected areas; where possible, you may be able to contact family members using text message or social media such as Facebook or Twitter.

Flights have resumed at all airports that were closed by the earthquake, except Sendai, Sado, Iwate-Hanamaki, and Misawa Airports. In Tokyo, most public transportation including trains and subways are operating. Many roads have been damaged in the Tokyo area and in northern Japan, particularly in the Miyagi prefecture where government checkpoints have been established on damaged roadways. In Iwate Prefecture, toll road highways are restricted to emergency vehicles only.

U.S. citizens currently in Japan should be aware that rolling power outages are scheduled for the Tokyo Metropolitan area and in northern and central Honshu. Tokyo Electric Company reports that three-hour outages may occur in various regions, including Tokyo. Please monitor the Tokyo Electric Power Company website, http://www.tepco.co.jp/en/index-e.html, and local news media for specific information and schedules for the planned outages. Radio stations in the Tokyo area that have emergency information in English include the U.S. Armed Forces station at 810 AM and InterFM (76.1FM).

The Japan Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA) has recommended that people who live within 20 kilometers of the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant in Okumacho evacuate the area immediately. Japanese authorities have confirmed that the situation remains serious. U.S. citizens residing or traveling in Fukushima Prefecture should follow NISA instructions to evacuate and comply with Japanese government personnel on the ground. More information on the status of the nuclear facilities and on areas affected by power outages is available on the NISA website, www.nisa.meti.go.jp/english. You can find more information on radiation emergencies from the Centers for Disease Control Emergency Preparedness and Response website at http://www.bt.cdc.gov/radiation.

Strong aftershocks are likely for weeks following a massive earthquake such as this one. The American Red Cross recommends that in the event of aftershocks, persons should move to open spaces away from walls, windows, buildings and other structures that may collapse, and should be alert to the danger of falling debris. If you are indoors, drop, cover, and hold on: If possible, seek cover under a sturdy desk or table, hold on, and protect your eyes by pressing your face against your arm. If there is no table or desk nearby, sit on the floor against an interior wall away from windows, bookcases or tall furniture that could fall on you. Avoid damaged buildings and downed power lines. Great care should be used with matches, lighters, candles or any open flame due to the possibility of disrupted gas lines.

Due to the continuing possibility of strong aftershocks, Japan remains at risk for further tsunamis. Japanese authorities have issued a warning for people to stay away from low-lying coastal areas. If a tsunami alert is issued by Japanese authorities, evacuate immediately to higher ground. Further information about what you can do if a tsunami occurs can be found at the National Weather Service TsunamiReady website, http://www.tsunamiready.noaa.gov, and the International Tsunami Information Center website, http://itic.ioc-unesco.org. Current tsunami alerts can be found at the Japan Meteorological Agency website, http://ww.jma.go.jp/en/tsunami/, and the website of the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center, http://ptwc.weather.gov.

U.S. citizens in Japan should contact family and friends in the United States to confirm their well-being at the earliest opportunity. Where internet and telephone services are not available, it may be possible to contact people using SMS (cell text message) or other forms of social media such as Twitter and Facebook. U.S. citizens requiring emergency consular assistance may contact the Department of State at the website JapanEmergencyUSC@state.gov and the emergency contact numbers below.

U.S. citizens in Japan are encouraged to enroll in the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) at https://travelregistration.state.gov. U.S. citizens without internet access may enroll directly at the U.S. Embassy or U.S. Consulates. By enrolling, U.S. citizens make it easier for the Embassy/Consulates to contact them in case of emergency.

Updated information on travel and security in Japan may be obtained from the Department of State by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the United States and Canada or, for callers outside the United States and Canada, a regular toll line at 1-202-501-4444. For further information, please consult the Country Specific Information for Japan, as well as the Worldwide Caution, which can be found at www.travel.state.gov.

Improved cell phone reception coming soon to Yokosuka base

Story and photo by Joe Schmitt, CFAY Public Affairs

Next month signals the completion of a project 10 years in the making, the installation of cell phone antennas which will provide better cell phone signals in more areas for the Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) base community.

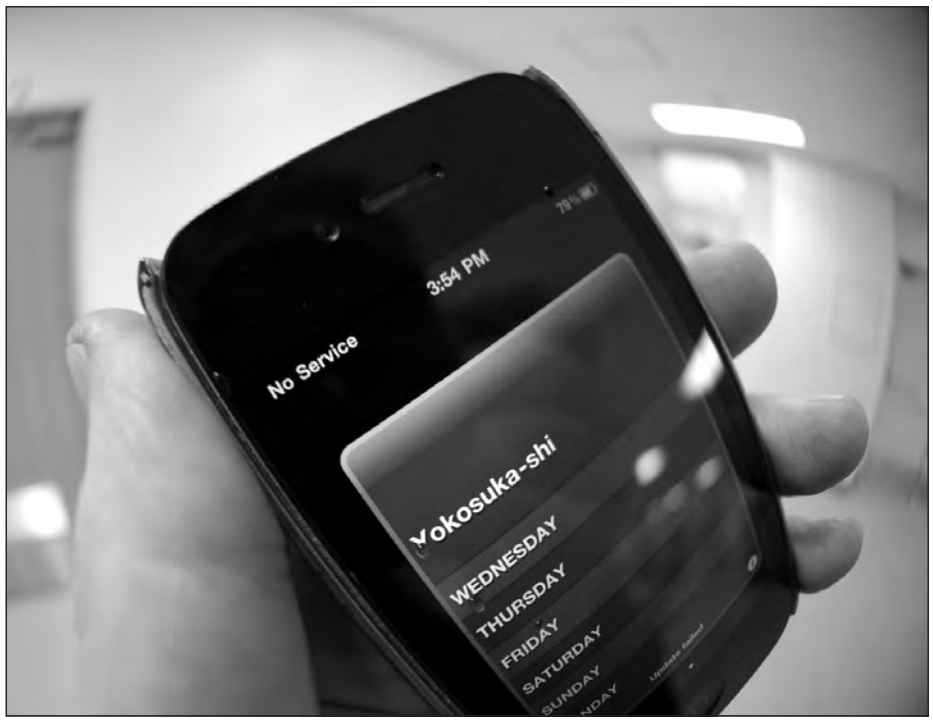
Japanese cell phone companies AU by KDDI, DOCOMO by NTT and Softbank Mobile Corporation will finish constructing cell phone antennas on top of Himawari, Ichiban and Asagao base housing towers in April. The towers will boost signal strength and availability by covering 'blind spots' where cell phone signals were previously weak or unavailable.

A study conducted by Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command and Japanese cell phone providers ensured there are no health risks associated with installing the antennas on top of the housing towers.

Ted Vactor, real estate contracting officer for Naval Facilities Engineering Command Far East (NAVFAC FE), is part of the team that has been working to conclude the project over the past 18 months. "Just about 10 years ago, according to historical sources, the installation commander requested to put cell phone antennas on top of the [housing] towers to increase cell phone coverage on base," said Vactor. "During Admiral Kelly's tenure, it was one of his priority quality of life projects that he wanted done. However, because of the complexities of the project involving the Japanese government and private companies and the fact that no licensing agreements existed, it was not an easy task."

Vactor added his efforts to the project after being hired two years ago. "It was part of my job interview, they wondered if I had ever produced any [real estate] licenses dealing with cell phones," Vactor said. "I had done cable agreements before but this was a little different. This is and always has been a CFAY project, but CFAY had never been involved in a project like this and required my assistance."

According to Vactor, the project was complex, with many legal, financial and logistical challenges. "Our team included CFAY, NAVFAC FE and Commander U.S. Naval Forces Japan working together to accomplish a common goal. NAVFAC initiated the process by going to the [Yokosuka City] Chamber of Commerce to solicit Japanese cell phone companies to determine interest in providing improved service on the base," he said.



A community member experiences a drop in cell phone coverage on Yokosuka base. Cell phone towers, scheduled to be completed next month, will provide better cell phone reception in more areas for the Yokosuka base community.

After the three companies agreed to improve coverage on base, the next step was to develop a process. "Until now, no process existed for installing cell phone antennas on a military installation in Japan," said Vactor. "So, CFAY was the control for the process, with NAVFAC providing technical assistance. Anything we did had to be written down, put into a process, followed up and coordinated to make sure everything was correct. Now that we have this process it will be easier for other bases to follow us. We can just show them our process and they can take it from there."

According to Vactor, signal testing will be conducted during construction to ensure maximum coverage, and customers should be able to see the improvements about a week after the testing is completed.

"It's increasing quality of life but it's also a big increase in efficiency," said Vactor. "All those people who previously had to stop what they were doing just to go outside and find a signal, will now be able to just pick up their phone and get service."