Health services intact for beneficiaries, extended to relief efforts

By Emily Greene, Military Health Systems

Following the devastating earthquake and tsunami in Japan March 11, military health professionals have maintained quality care for Department of Defense (DoD) beneficiaries and extended a helping hand to relief efforts across the country.

Despite widescale devastation in Japan, service members and their families are still receiving quality medical care both in country and for those who have chosen to return to the United States during their transition home.

Sailors, Marines and civilians throughout Navy Region Northwest are working with their Army and Air Force counterparts along with other agencies, including SEATAC, Port of Seattle, Transportation Security Administration, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and volunteers from the United Services Organization (USO) and American Red Cross to provide assistance to family members who have chosen to return to the United States after the earthquake.

Navy Region Northwest Fleet and Family Support Center is providing assistance with all the families' needs during their relocation including counseling, medical and exceptional family member assistance.

While members of DoD and their families are being taken care of both in Japan and throughout their transition home, emergency health care is being provided along with preventative measures in assistance of those affected by the disaster.

The crew of the USS Essex (LHD 2) along with the embarked 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit was quick to respond in the aftermath of the disaster, heading towards Japan as early as March 12.

The Essex Amphibious Ready Group can provide fresh water, medical contingency support, search and rescue support, heavy lift capabilities and transportation via amphibious crafts.

In a release from III Marine Expeditionary Force public affairs office March 18, Lt. Col. William Arick, commanding officer, Combat Logistics Battalion 31, 31st MEU said the purpose of his team in this disaster relief is to alleviate human suffering and prevent the loss of life by rapidly delivering critical capabilities.

"Disaster relief efforts are always organized by civilian leadership and the military's logistics capabilities – the ability to move supplies and people by air, ground and sea – makes us an ideal response team to support these efforts," he said.

For information about TRICARE benefits and services and new information for DoD beneficiaries relocating from Japan visit http://www.tricare.mil/tsunami/.

For more information on the voluntary authorized departure for eligible DoD family members from designated areas in Japan, read Naval Administrative Message NAVADMIN 093/11 at www.npc.navy.mil.

All Sailors or family members who are in need of assistance should utilize the Navy Family Accountability and Assessment System support site at www.navyfamily.navy.mil to ensure the Navy can track and assess support requirements for all parties affected. Navy Fleet and Family Support Center has a 24-hour hotline available to provide family support information at 866-854-0638.

Additional information is also available on the Navy Personnel Command website at: http://www.npc.navy.mil/CareerInfo/PayAndBenefits/JapanEarthquake.htm.

Tax filing deadlines unaffected by recent tragic events in Japan

From Judge Advocate General's Corps

Service members participating in, or in support of, contingency operations overseas receive an automatic extension to file tax returns and pay any tax they may owe. The extension for contingency operations is 180 days after the last day the individual serves in the contingency operation plus the number of days remaining for the individual to file when he or she began serving in the contingency operation. At this time, Operation Tomodachi does not fit the definition of a contingency operation. Therefore, these individuals will need to rely on existing Internal Revenue Service (IRS) extensions if they require more time to file their tax returns.

Personnel assigned overseas, including Japan, receive an automatic two-month extension to June 15 to file and pay their 2010 income taxes. This extension is automatic for service members on an assigned tour outside the United States and Puerto Rico on April 18. This extension also applies to U.S. citizens or resident aliens who live outside the United States and Puerto Rico whose main place of business or post of duty is outside the United States or Puerto Rico. Overseas personnel and dependents who return to the United States before April 18 April on a temporary basis, including those who evacuated Japan, qualify for the automatic two-month extension because they are still considered to be assigned overseas so long as they are not reassigned to the United States.

As a reminder, this automatic two-month extension is for filing and paying only, so taxpayers who owe taxes and will not have a refund from the IRS, will be charged interest on any unpaid amounts beginning April 18. However, they will not be charged a late payment penalty or a late filing penalty. Personnel who are married and file a joint return need only one spouse to qualify for both to use the extension. If filing separately, each spouse must separately qualify as living overseas to use the extension. To use this automatic extension if filing after April 18, you must attach a statement to your return explaining which situation qualifies you for the extension. If you file at a military VITA center, the tax preparer can enter the overseas extension explanation on your electronic return.

Even if not assigned overseas, personnel who are participating in Operation Tomodachi or other operations which are not designated contingency operations and not in a combat zone will receive an automatic two-month extension until June 15 to file their 2010 income taxes if they are outside of the United States or Puerto Rico on April 18. If these individuals return to the U.S. before April 18, they must file their tax return by April 18 to avoid being charged interest on any amount they owe or any penalties for late payment.

Taxpayers who require additional time to file their return may file IRS Form 4868 to request an extension until Oct. 17. In order to qualify for this xtension, Form 4868 must be filed by the regular due date of the return, which is April 18 for taxpayers in the United States or June 15 for those who are overseas. Be sure to check the box on line 8 for the full additional time to file. Taxpayers who take this automatic extension will still be charged interest on any amount they owe that is not paid by the April 18 due date until the date the tax is paid. A late payment penalty and a late filing penalty is normally also charged, unless the taxpayer can show reasonable cause for not paying on time. Taxpayers should attach a statement to their return explaining the reason.

Spouses of individuals who served in a combat zone or a contingency operation are entitled to the same deadline extension with two exceptions:

- The extension does not apply to a spouse for any tax year beginning more than two years after the date the area ceases to be a combat zone or the operation ceases to be a contingency operation.
- The extension does not apply to a spouse for any period the qualifying individual is hospitalized in the United States for injuries sustained in a combat zone or a contingency operation.

Eligible individuals can receive tax filing information and assistance at Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program/Electronic Filing (ELF) centers. In addition to preparing and filing 2010 tax returns, these centers can also submit Form 4868 electronically. A list of U.S. Navy VITA centers is available online by accessing the U.S. Navy JAG website at: http://www.jag.navy.mil/organization/code_16_tax_info.htm.

For more information, please see IRS Publication 3, the Armed Forces Tax Guide at: http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p3.pdf. Those wishing to download Form 4868 may do so from the IRS website at: http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f4868.pdf.

Navy releases travel reimbursement guidance for authorized voluntary departure, stop movement to Japan

From Chief of Naval Personnel Public Affairs

Guidance on reimbursement of travel and transportation allowances and expenses for Sailors, civilians and their family members who were authorized departure from Japan or were directed to stop movement to Japan was released in Naval Administrative Message NAVADMIN 113/11 March 30.

Sailors, civilians and their family members should keep all receipts for expenses incurred and submit travel and reimbursement claims to the central processing site, Travel Processing Center (TPC-HR), Hampton Roads, Va.

Documents needed include a copy of completed and signed orders, travel itinerary issued by a commercial transportation office, lodging receipts, airline tickets purchased and any other expenses incurred during travel.

Lodging receipts are required for reimbursement. In accordance with the Joint Travel Regulation (JTFR) U6054-B1, Sailors, civilians and family members who stay with friends or relatives are not authorized lodging reimbursement, even if lodging payment is made to a friend or relative.

Since meals are part of the per diem allowance, receipts are not required for submission, but it is recommended that all receipts be kept.

Personnel entitled to designated destination pay and allowances may request a 30-day advance payment of per diem. Requests can be sent to evacuations@navy.mil. For advanced pay questions, contact TPC-HR at 1-866-239-0303 or e-mail to evacuations@navy.mil.

A travel claim, with required receipts, must be filed every 30 days to settle expenses even if an advance travel payment was received.

All travel and reimbursement payments will be deposited into the sponsor's regular payday bank account. Contact TPC-HR if a change in financial institutions is required.

The NAVADMIN also reminds affected personnel to log onto the Navy Family Accountability and Assessment System (NFAAS) at https://navyfamily.navy.mil to complete the assessment section including accurate contact numbers.

For support or questions regarding logging onto NFAAS, contact NFAAS technical support at 1-866-946-9183 or NFAAS@spawar.navy.mil. If computer access is not available, contact the Navy Personnel Command Customer Service Center at 1-866-827-5672.

For more information on reimbursement procedures, see NAVADMIN 113/11 at www.npc.navy.mil or contact TPC-HR at -866-239-0303 or e-mail to evacuations@navy.mil.

The Chief of Naval Personnel (CNP) is responsible to the Chief of Naval Operations for Navy's manpower readiness. Dual-titled, CNP also serves as Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (Manpower, Personnel, Training Education/N1) and oversees the Bureau of Naval Personnel, Navy Personnel Command and the Navy Manpower Analysis Center.