Disaster preparedness in Japan – doing your part

By Paul Long, CFAY Public Affairs

So you're a spouse, civilian or family member relatively new to Japan or you lived through the Fukushima disaster in March and weren't quite prepared for a catastrophe of that magnitude. Now you're facing another mother nature randomly created event, no evacuation is called for, and you have to hunker down and ride out the storm or the shakes of the quake. What do you do and where do you go for information?

"Being ready for a disaster begins with preparation. Being prepared can reduce fear, anxiety and losses that accompany disasters," said Commnader Fleet Activities Yokosuka Public Affairs Officer Michelle Stewart. "Communities, families, and individuals should know what to do in the event of a fire and where to seek shelter during a tornado. They should be ready to evacuate their homes and take refuge in public shelters and know how to care for their basic medical needs."

People also can reduce the impact of disasters (securing items that could shake loose in an earthquake) and sometimes avoid the danger completely.

Disasters disrupt hundreds of thousands of lives every year. Each disaster has lasting effects, both to people and property. If a disaster occurs in your community, local government and disaster-relief organizations will try to help you, but you need to be ready as well. Local responders may not be able to reach you immediately, or they may need to focus their efforts elsewhere.

"You should know how to respond to severe weather or any disaster that could occur in your area - hurricanes, earthquakes, extreme cold, flooding, or terrorism," said Stewart.

To assist in preparedness plan there are several links listed below.

Command's official webpage: http://www.cnic.navy.mil/Yokosuka/index.htm// This site has documentation for Noncombatant Evacuations (NEO) and general family preparedness plans listed in the popular links section.

Command's official Facebook page: Facebook; http://www.facebook.com/cfayokosuka. Real time/updated community information Federal Emergency Management Agency website: http://www.fema.gov/areyouready

American Red Cross: www.redcross.org. This site has checklists for earthquakes, tsunamis, typhoons and other disasters.

These links can assist you prepare for disasters. On the base, both the American Red Cross and Navy Exchange provide information on obtaining and preparing kits for use when bad weather strikes. I recently picked up a NEX Typhoon Preparedness Program flyer inside the Autoport myself.

"Because we live in a country prone to earthquakes, typhoons and tsunami's it's essential for every family to have a family plan. This plan should include but not limited to a list of important contact numbers, the location of previously assembled important papers and documents, photographs and an inventory of your belongings, should have a disaster plan," said Stewart. "Utilize the template location on the command website to personalize it to your own unique situation. Then practice the plan with you family. Know what to do, where to go, and how long it takes to get there when bad weather or an earthquake hits."

On base, your sponsor's command is the first place to start. Stay put and await official word from your sponsor's command. Watch the base access channel (15) or listen to Eagle 810 A.M. radio. The most up-to-date information will be posted on official command/Facebook pages as soon as possible after the information is made available.

Off base, you can use the on base sites as well. Dependent upon where you live, get to know your neighborhood association. They have disaster drills and can show you where to go in the event of an emergency. Each neighborhood also have an assigned evacuation site – find out where that is. Contact the city hall where you live, many have English speaking personnel who can assist you.

You should also find, bookmark, and get familiar with your city's English language website. For Yokosuka, it is http://www.city.yokosuka.kanagawa.jp/0140/english/index.html; for Yokohama: http://www.city.yokohama.lg.jp.cache.yimg.jp/en/; for Tokyo http://www.metro.tokyo.jp/ENGLISH/.

Family members who aren't American citizens are encouraged to contact their countries embassy for more information about their specific countries policies during a disaster. The U.S. Embassy's site in Tokyo is: http://japan.usembassy.gov/.

According to Daniel Rourke, CFAY's Housing personnel support manager, off base residents should locate and participate in their neighborhood associations.

"I reside in Yokosuka's Maborikaigan area with my family. When I first moved here, an elderly Japanese man from the neighborhood association spoke to me, in English, and gave me some information (in English) about the neighborhood and participating in disaster drills." Rouke said.

Every command has an ombudsman, an official source for command information. They are one of the first people contacted with official information when a disaster occurs. Every command should also have a NEO coordinator. Don't wait for disaster to strike to seek this person out and get information.

Write down the phone numbers below, tack them to the refrigerator, and program them into your cell phone. They can provide you with English language disaster information.

Yokosuka International Association: 046-827-2166; Yokosuka City International Relations Division: 046-822-8138; Yokohama City Call Center: 045-222-1209; U.S. Tokyo: 03-3224-5000; and the Tokyo English Life Line (TELL): 03-5774-0992. TELL is a volunteer organization dedicated to helping all foreigners living in Japan.

"Knowing your environment is the first step to being empowered," said Stewart. "Preparedness is a shared responsibility – are you doing your part?"

The editor asks:

Did you know, the navy has an emergency notification system that can be used during a crisis to warn affected Sailors and civilians who live and work on the base?

The wide area alert notification (WAAN) system benefits the workforce aboard an installation by providing real-time emergency condition alerts.

According to a message from Commander Navy Installations Command, crisis events ranging from 9/11, hurricane Katrina, and the shootings at Virginia tech and fort hood demonstrated the requirement to rapidly disseminate emergency information to personnel.

WAAN consists of four sub systems which are: Computer DesktopNotification System (CDNS), automated telephone notification system (ATNS), giant voice, and interior voice.

CDNS and ATNI are deployed to OneNet users in the form of the AtHoc Self Service Client Application, which starts automatically on computers at start up. This capability allows users to receive key desktop pop-up messages and email, or text and telephonic notifications.

Region commanders and installation commanding officers have been directed to take immediate action to have all assigned personnel register their emergency contact information with the Self Service Client Application.

Users have to manually register their emergency contact information via the AtHoc Self Service Client Application in order to receive phone, e-mail, or text notifications when they are sent out.

During the registration process, a people can enter up to three phone numbers ,including cell phones, and a personal e-mail address to receive the notifications. Once registered, they will receive notifications directly from the Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Emergency Operations Center (EOC) whenever messages are sent out. During the recent northern Japan earthquake, EOC sent out messages via WAAN.

OneNet users are required to register their emergency contact information via the AtHoc Self Service Client Application.

To register their information user need to:

1: Right-click on the athoc self service client (purple globe) icon in the users system tray which is in the bottom right corner of the Computer screen.

2: Select "Access Self Service" from the pop up menu.

3: The AtHoc Self Service Client Application will open. Select the "My info" tab and update your last name, first name, and display name and then save.

4: Select the "devices" tab and enter your contact information in the appropriate fields and then save.