

Volunteer Firefighters in Japan

February & March 2022

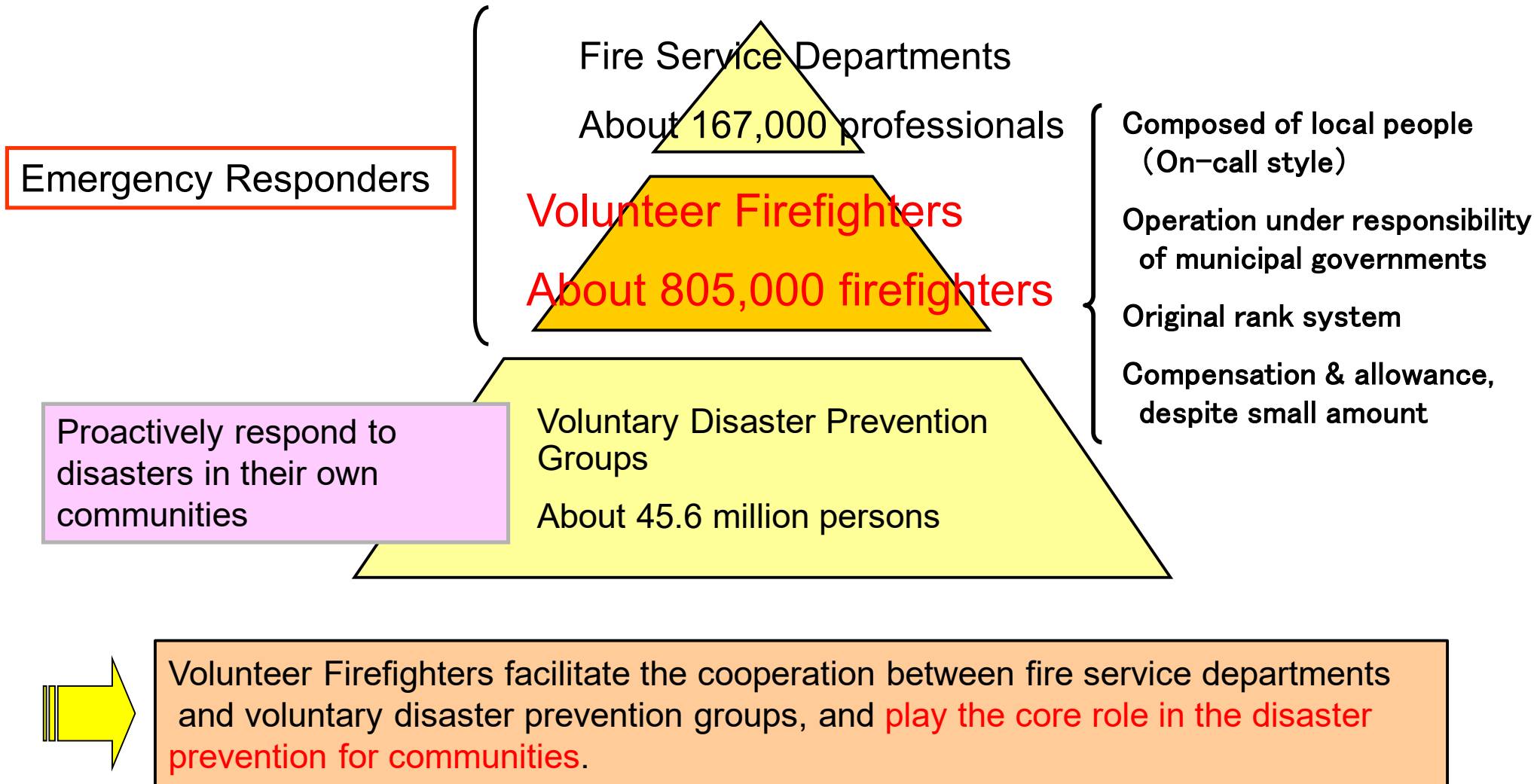
Regional Disaster Management Office,
Fire and Disaster Management Agency, Japan



1. Outline of Volunteer Firefighters

Outline of Japan's Volunteer Firefighters

As of April 1, 2021



Equipment Employed by Volunteer Firefighters

Fire Engine



Flood Light



Transceiver



Engine Cutter



Chain Saw



Rescue Tools



Hydraulic Cutter



Firefighting Equipment



Rescue Boat



Advantageous Aspects of Volunteer Firefighters

1. Close to Community

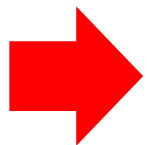
Have known their own communities and its situations better than professional firefighters

2. Robust Mobilization

Have five times more members than professionals

3. Rapid Response

Can start firefighting/rescue activities even before professionals attend the frontline, as regularly conducting exercises



These advantageous characters enable robust disaster response

Main Tasks in Disaster Response



Fire Fighting

- ◆ Close collaboration with professionals for effective firefighting
- ◆ Patrolling on fire incident site after fire suppression to prevent another fire from happening



Rescue

- ◆ Search and rescue, in cooperation with professionals



Flood Fighting

- ◆ Preventing river flood by typhoon or torrential shower from happening with flood fighting method
- ◆ Instruction and assistance for residents evacuation

Main Tasks in Non - Disaster Times



Courtesy of Miyazaki Fire Department



Courtesy of Miyazaki Fire Department



Courtesy of Miyazaki Fire Department

Exercises

- ◆ Regularly conducting exercises
- ◆ Training for handling hose and other equipment

Lectures

- ◆ Lectures to local people regarding first aid including AED

Public Awareness

- ◆ Raising public awareness for fire prevention and disaster risk reduction through organizing events

2. Case Studies

- How Volunteer Firefighters Function in Disasters -

Great East Japan Earthquake

Tsunami

- ◆ Instruction for local people to evacuate, stopping at every houses in the community
- ◆ Closing water gates at shore immediately after tsunami warning issued

➡ **The disaster was too large for professionals to handle these missions – then covered by volunteers.**

Firefighting

- ◆ Water resource lacked due to the earthquake, which required long-distance pumping from rivers to disaster affected communities
- ◆ Fire scale was so large and continued for many days

➡ **Only professionals were not enough to suppress the fires – volunteers' support proved vital.**

Rescue

- ◆ Instructed local people to evacuate to higher place, and rescued those isolated at nursing homes and carried to shelters

➡ **Volunteers' detail knowledge on communities helped the rescue and the evacuation guidance effective.**



firefighting by volunteers



Courtesy of Tokyo Fire Department

Professionals and volunteers working together



Courtesy of Tokyo Fire Department

Evacuation guide by volunteers

Northern Kyushu Flooding and Landslides

Northern Kyushu region was hit by a wall of water due to river floods and landslides caused by unprecedented heavy rainfall.

Volunteer Firefighters Involvement

The disaster-affected-areas were too wide for only professionals to carry out search and rescue.



“Robust Mobilization” – one of the volunteers advantageous aspects, functioned well.



Max 4,000 volunteers engaged in the disaster responses such as

- evacuation instruction and safety confirmation
- search and rescue
- removal of drifted timbers and shoveling of mud and
- emergency water supply and carriage of food to isolated areas.



Volunteers on searching (Asakura City)

Itoigawa City Great Fire

- ◆ A fire incident occurred at a populated area in Itoigawa City in 2016 and flying sparks in multiple locations were simultaneously created, leading to the spread of fire.
- ◆ Strong southern wind was another factor to hugely spread the fire.

Firefighting

Necessary to combat fires spreading in about 40,000m². Volunteers secured water resource by pumping water from river with portable pumpers, which helped professionals keep on firefighting for many hours.

➡ Volunteer Firefighters proved their ability to back up the professionals long-period firefighting.

Rescue

Evacuation Instruction

➡ Volunteer firefighters, who were familiar with fire incident areas, underpinned prompt instruction of evacuation.

