

Business Continuity Plan (BCP) based on Lessons Learned from the Great East Japan Earthquake

Rikuzentakata City



Background and Reason for the Project

The city of Rikuzentakata suffered catastrophic damage from the tsunami triggered by the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake in 2011. The city hall was flooded and 111 people, or 25% of its employees, lost their lives, which caused major disruptions to government operations.



City hall flooded by the tsunami



Inside the city hall after the disaster

Project Aims

The project aims to ensure the continuity of government operations by identifying high-priority activities in advance, securing the necessary resources and defining the allocation method for the activities so that the city can promptly and appropriately take the necessary actions even in the event of large-scale natural disasters.

Project Outline

In the event of a disaster, access to resources including people, things and information is limited. The City of Rikuzentakata has established a business continuity plan (BCP) which determines in advance the operational structure, response protocol, and resources required in order for its services to remain operational even under such severe circumstances.

While creating this plan, especially when identifying high priority targets, which would both greatly affect civilian life and require the city to make great effort to coordinate, the city has developed five basic policies based on the lessons learned from the disaster.

1. Based on lessons learned from the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake

Sort out activities to be given the highest priority based on lessons learned from the disaster that the government actually experienced.

2. Save citizens' lives above all else

In the case of a large-scale natural disaster, the city must focus on saving citizens' lives.

3. Support victims' lives

Although the government must treat citizens fairly at all times, they must provide compassionate priority care and support to those who were most seriously affected by the disaster.

4. Restoring citizens' livelihoods at an early stage

To ensure the provision of support to citizens who need it from the government, it is necessary to reduce the number of citizens to support. To do so, it is important to recover city functions as quickly as possible to develop an environment where citizens can lead a normal life by themselves.

5. Improve city employees' awareness towards the business continuity plan in times of peace

In order to properly execute the plan when a disaster strikes, it is important for every city employee to confirm their roles through regular emergency drills and exercises.



Temporary disaster management headquarters

Features and Innovations

Although there are so many tasks that need to be performed immediately after a disaster, the

city has selected those that must be fulfilled as high-priority activities for all city employees across all departments and sections. There were 1,374 tasks that needed to be handled during the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake.

As for the task selection process, the city employed a bottom-up method: First, city employees form the smallest groups required to perform their tasks and within these groups they select the most important tasks and consider when they need to be performed after the disaster. Second, the small groups gather to form larger middle-sized groups with their selected high-priority activities and go through the same process as they did previously. Third, the middle-sized groups bring their choice of actions into the group to share among all. The reason the city chose the bottom-up method was because no matter how small the task may seem, it can be important to citizens and should not be left out. This activity raises city employees' understanding and awareness of BCP by getting everyone involved in the creation process.

The city has also devised a plan where they divided the period of one month after the disaster into five phases, set an action objective for each phase and selected high-priority activities based on it.

Phase 1 (In the first 30 minutes after an earthquake): Establishment of actions to protect citizens' lives and first response systems

Phase 2 (After the first 30 minutes until the end of the day): Collection of damage information and emergency support measures

Phase 3 (Second day): Enhancement of rescue operations and evacuee support

Phase 4 (From the third day to week 1): Start

of emergency restoration activities and increasing support services for victims”

Phase 5 (From week 1 until the end of the first month): Restoration of livelihood and government operations

As a result, the city selected 17 tasks for the first phase, 41 for the second, 27 for the third, 16 for fourth, and 15 for fifth, or 116 in total.

As natural disasters are unpredictable, the city has prepared an action sheet which lists the procedures for high-priority activities and relevant contacts, so that any city employee who come into the office can perform the tasks even when a disaster occurs at night or on a holiday. In the event of a disaster it is important for city employees to work as one team to respond to citizens’ needs.

Results of the Project

In the event of a disaster, small-sized local governments must take numerous countermeasures against natural disasters with a limited number of public employees available. Therefore, it is highly affective for the city to decide in advance on which high-priority activities should be completed during an emergency. Furthermore, creating an action sheet and enabling all employees regardless of their type of service to perform the tasks allow the city to respond to disasters in a prompt manner. This provides residents with assurance, thus increasing public trust.

Issues, Problems and Responses

To ensure that all the city employees complete high-priority activities, they must understand the details of the action sheet and repeatedly conduct drills on a regular basis. In order to achieve this, employees must be made aware that emergency response actions must be performed by everyone regardless of which department or division they work in.

Future Developments (expected effects and project vision and issues)

Once issues have been identified and verified through emergency drills, the city can implement a PDCA cycle which allows for new improvements to brush up on the contents, further refining the plan.

Reference URL

<http://www.city.rikuzentakata.iwate.jp/>

Contact

Division in charge: Disaster Prevention Bureau Disaster Prevention Section
Phone: +81-192-54-2111
Email: bousai@city.rikuzentakata.iwate.jp

Terminologies and Coined Terms Used

High-priority activities

Actions that must take precedence over others even in the event of a large-scale disaster