

FINDINGS TO IMPROVE JAPANESE EARTHQUAKE PREPAREDNESS LEARNED FROM A CROSS-CULTURAL QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY IN JAPAN AND THE UNITED STATES*

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Providing people with appropriate information is an essential element to enhance their earthquake preparedness. To be effective, balance between supply and demand should be kept in dissemination of the information. To seek the balance, a cross-cultural questionnaire survey was made. Respondents were from two groups in the United States and one group in Japan. The survey revealed that, contrary to the other two groups, the Japanese group showed overdependency on government initiatives rather than taking self-help action for earthquake preparedness.

Keywords : earthquake preparedness, questionnaire, self-help

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1978 the Large Scale Earthquake Countermeasures Act came into effect in Japan. A main target of this Act is the Tokai earthquake which is supposedly imminent and expected to occur beneath Suruga Bay where an earthquake of Magnitude (M) 8 or larger has been absent since 1854. Following this Act, instrumentation arrays were set up to monitor precursors of the earthquake and data from the arrays have been telemetered to Tokyo where the Japn Meteorological Agency will review them and judge whether meetings of the Prediction Committee will need to be held. A series of such government efforts tended to lead the Japanese to conclude that the state of earthquake preparedness in Japan is much advanced. This conclusion is indeed, an unfortunate illusion. Earthquake awareness of people and communities still remains at a low level and willingness to reduce earthquake risk appears to be reluctant^{1)~3)}.

Recently a variety of detailed checklists and survival guides has become available in Japan as well as in the United States. For example, the Bay Area Regional Earthquake Preparedness Project (BAREPP) has prepared many checklists for local governments, the media, hospitals, schools, neighborhood and Bay Area decision makers with a main focus on each household. Survival guides, which include first-aid treatments and general hints on what to do before, during, and after an earthquake, are described over ten pages in a telephone directory in the United States. These messages apparently constitute necessary conditions for earthquake preparedness, but not necessarily satisfactory ones. One should recall an old saying : "To know is one thing, and to practice is another".

Mere awareness of earthquake threat and knowlede of earthquake science will not promote people to take

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