

ROAD TO RECOVERY

**Earthquake Updates by JWCU
Japan Workers' Co-operative Union
May 17, 2011**

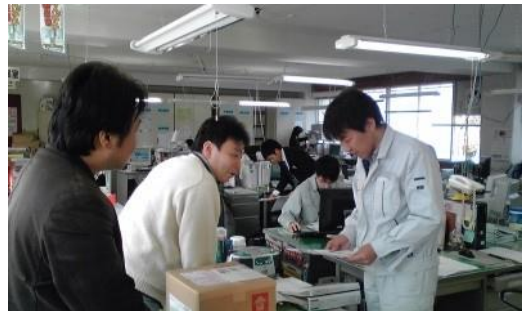
Over 2 months have past since the catastrophic earthquake and tsunami. We still have aftershocks almost daily, and the meltdown at one of the reactors in Fukushima nuclear plant was just uncovered.

Nonetheless, we are definitely going forward. The processes may be slow, but we are taking one step at a time. In addition to the nationwide support, we are increasingly hearing about people in Tohoku region starting their own efforts to rebuild communities. This issue will introduce some of these stories.

From the Frontline: Let's Get Busy!

Working Together with Municipalities

Our members in Tohoku are ready to get busy. On April 20th and 21st, members in Tohoku have visited municipalities, which have been affected by the disaster, to donate our product "Clean Killer A (disinfectant)" as well as to discuss with city workers about how worker coops could contribute to reconstruction of the communities.



Several city workers raised the issues of unemployment and job creation. At one municipality, the members were asked to prepare a project proposal to reconstruct the community.

It may take years to recover and reconstruct the region, but our members are determined to work with the communities to make the region better than ever.

Recovery Efforts and Future Plans Were Shared at Member Meeting in Iwate

Members of Center Jigyodan (JWCU member) in Iwate Prefecture held a meeting on April 23rd to share their experiences and reconstruction plans. The meeting started with the

regional director’s message: “We won’t be beaten down. We got to stand up and rebuild our communities!”

The report from each site revealed how the members have supported their communities since the earthquake and tsunami. For example, a public facility with big bathes has been used as the self defense force’s station for recovery work, and a youth support station has been providing hot meals to the community residents twice a week. One of the members reported that his site has been offered a new job from the municipality for community reconstruction.

Similar meetings are to be held in each of the Tohoku prefectures to unify the efforts to move forward.

Youth Volunteers: Good for Communities and Themselves

JWCU operates over 10 youth support stations nationwide, providing vocational support for youth. At one of the stations in Miyagi, its clients (i.e. youth) are now involved in the recovery work (e.g. cleaning houses, sorting and delivering supplies) in affected areas as part of their vocational training.



Many of these young people have difficulties finding jobs for various reasons, including withdrawal from the society. However, according to a staff member at the station, “It seems that they are gradually feeling compassion for people in need. Many of them are now taking action willingly.”

Nanohana (Rapeseeds) Project in Miyagi: Inter-cooperative Cooperation and Potential for Cleansing Soil

In 2009, Center Jigyodan (JWCU member) launched “Nanohana (Rapeseeds) Project,” where the members lease unused farmlands to grow rapeseeds and produce cooking oil and bio fuel. The project is now about to be expanded to Miyagi Prefecture, where we can also see inter-cooperative cooperation with agricultural and consumer cooperatives.



At Nanohana Project in Miyagi, Jigyodan will lease land for the plant from agricultural cooperatives, and used cooking oil will be provided by co-op shops to produce bio fuel. Since Jigyodan also operates a youth support station (job assistance for youth) in the area, this

project will also provide job/interning opportunities for youth. The bio fuel will be used by co-op delivery trucks and farm machines. The project was scheduled to launch in April 2011, but it is postponed to July due to the earthquake.

Japan is now trying to use rape plants to clean up soil contaminated by the nuclear accident in Fukushima. Therefore, this project may have an even larger impact on our society.

Nationwide Support

Members in Hyogo Prefecture Helped Clean Up the Community in Miyagi

From April 29th to May 5th, 9 JWCU members from Hyogo Prefecture (close to Osaka) were in Miyagi to help our members in Ishinomaki City to clean up the area. They brought their own machineries (see the picture) and removed debris in the area at unbelievable speed.



The president of Ishinomaki Jigyodan (JWCU member) says, “I didn’t expect this place to be cleaned up so fast. The power of our fellow cooperators’ support is just amazing. I am really grateful.”

Supporting and Bonding with Evacuees

Thousands of people in the coastal area of Fukushima Prefecture have been forced out of their communities since the nuclear plant crisis, and many of them have evacuated to Saitama Prefecture (north of Tokyo). Our members, who run community services in Fujimino City in Saitama, invited 14 evacuees from Fukushima to a tea party on April 24th.



The leader of the site greeted, “Welcome to the party! We have heard that some of our new neighbors have evacuated from Fukushima, and we have been thinking about what we can do. My husband also grew up in Fukushima. We hope we get to know and support each other.” Everyone at the party introduced him/herself, and the conversation moved naturally to the evacuees’ concerns and needs. Some needed sheets and pillows, while others needed a rice cooker and a microwave.

Our members in Fujimino are already planning on more activities with the new neighbors.

Messages of Support: From Children to Children

JWCU members provide services for children nationwide. In the wake of the earthquake and tsunami, children at our children's halls across the country have made and sent messages of support to our children's halls in Tohoku region. Some children also volunteered to make and send toys to Tohoku along with their messages.



Realizing the national scale of its services for children, JWCU has set up a “sister sites” system. There are 5 children's halls in Sendai City (Miyagi Prefecture), and each hall will have 4 “sister sites (partnering children's halls)” across the country. This effort may turn this devastating tragedy into the wonderful partnership and friendship among children as well as worker coop members throughout the country.