

Volunteer Activities in Flood-ravaged Area of Joso City



Many of MOL's social contribution activities center on relief efforts to assist areas hit by storms, earthquakes, and other natural disasters. While it is critical to provide swift transport of aid supplies in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, we believe it is also important to follow up with additional assistance even afterwards. This special feature introduces relief activities by 26 new MOL employees in the flood-stricken area of Joso City in April 2016.

Flood in Joso, and MOL's response

The Kinugawa River overflowed its banks on September 10, 2015, leaving a huge section of the city's eastern district underwater – an area measuring 18km north-south and 4 km east-west. Three people died, and more than 5,000 homes were flooded. Today, the flood-ravaged area still faces a host of problems such as delays in repairing the flooded houses, a decline in agriculture, the area's major industry, a weakening of the local economy, and a worsening sense of distress among those affected by the disaster. Government agencies and non-profit organizations are both working to assist in the reconstruction efforts.

In light of the current situation, employees who joined MOL in fiscal 2016 visited the area as a part of the new employee training program, and conducted support activities in cooperation with the Tasukeai Center Juntos operated by the non-profit organization Ibaraki NPO Center Commons.

About Ibaraki NPO Center Commons

The authorized non-profit Ibaraki NPO Center Commons, established in 1996, provides Japanese language education for foreign children in its Joso office. In September 2015, it established the Tasukeai Center Juntos to conduct relief activities for those affected by the disaster and to serve as an information center during the disaster. Juntos is working to restore homes damaged by the flood, help displaced people move, and support the local community.

Relief Activities

1 Bus trip to disaster-affected area

The area affected by the flood is large, and different areas face different obstacles to recovery. MOL new employees toured the area by bus, and learned about the diversity of difficulties facing the community by looking closely at the collapsed banks of the Kinugawa River and the area that suffered the most serious flooding.



Examining traces of the flood damage on a hedge

2 Eating emergency rations for lunch

New employees ate a lunch of emergency rations such as canned bread and rice, the same foods served at evacuation shelters during the flood. This allowed them to see the aftermath of the flood from the point of view of those most impacted by the tragedy, and reminded them how important it is to make preparations for a disaster.



New employees eat a lunch of emergency rations. Heating water to prepare emergency rations

3 Volunteer activities in disaster-stricken areas

Activity 1: Cleanup at noodle factory affected by disaster

At the request of the owner's spouse, the new MOL employees helped to clean up a local noodle factory that was severely damaged in the flood. Wearing dust-protective masks, they split up into teams to rearrange household goods and furnishings that were hastily moved to the second floor as the floodwaters approached and clean up floors and ceilings. They took everything outside for a thorough cleaning and removed garbage from the site. "The place has been cleaned beyond recognition," said the owner's spouse. "We are so happy."



Inside the noodle factory before cleanup

New employees clean and rearrange household goods.

Activity 2: Sharing a tea break with local residents

Many restaurants, which served as meeting places for community associations and gathering places for local residents, were damaged in the flood, so the sense of community in the flood-ravaged area is rapidly disappearing. To prevent elderly residents from feeling isolated, which could aggravate their physical and mental health problems, it is essential to find spots where people displaced by the flood can get together. As part of that effort, eight flood-displaced residents were invited to the NPO office to chat with new MOL employees and enjoy tea, cookies, and other snacks.



Tea and conversation at the NPO office

4 Voices of New Employees after the Visit

- I could clearly appreciate the huge difference between learning about disaster-stricken areas through the media and actually seeing it with my own eyes. Before this, I had a vague knowledge of such things through the news, but now I will be more conscious about disaster-stricken areas and think about what I can do to help.
- I experienced how the perceptions of flood damage and the degree of reconstruction required vary so much even among people who suffered similar damage. I realized anew that I don't have to talk to community members with incorrect, preconceived notions about their positions.
- From talking with those affected by the flood, I learned that safety depends on awareness of risks. I will take care not to fall into ignorance and lack of consideration when thinking about safety, and I realize that when I say things like "I don't know" and "It has nothing to do with me," I can be opening myself up to unnecessary risks



A group shot of new MOL employees with NPO staff and the spouse of the noodle factory owner

5 Comment from NPO

As time passes since the flood, fewer volunteers come to the disaster-stricken areas. There are still many homes that have not yet been cleaned up. Thanks to MOL employees, reconstruction has started on the noodle factory. Thanks to their visit, we know we are not forgotten, and we have people who support us. This encourages us more than anything. Thank you very much.



Yoshihiro Yokota
Representative of Tasukeai Center Juntos

The MOL Group continually takes a proactive stance to assist in disaster relief and reconstruction activities in Japan and around the world.