

Japan: quake could trigger 'gigantic' tsunami , massive disaster

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Quake may trigger 'gigantic' tsunami

Local governments in tsunami-prone areas are calling for the government to give a clear definition as early as possible of the height of "the largest possible tsunami" predicted by a government panel in preparation for working out countermeasures.

They have asked the central government for clarification as to what would be the maximum height of the largest possible tsunami cited by an expert panel of the Central Disaster Management Council, an advisory organ of the Cabinet Office.

In a preview of its interim report on tsunami response measures compiled Sunday, the panel calls for the central and local governments to work out measures that can deal with "the largest scientifically possible tsunami."

Feeling the strongest sense of pressure and urgency are those local governments threatened by Tokai, Tonankai and Nankai earthquakes, which experts say may occur in succession.

As for those quakes, experts forecast at least a 60 percent probability of occurrence within 30 years. The researchers who analyzed the Great East Japan Earthquake and ensuing tsunami warned that there is a possibility of a "gigantic" tsunami up to two times the size of what was previously thought to be the largest possible tsunami.

The Nagoya municipal government decided earlier this month to designate 103 buildings it owns in areas close to the sea as tsunami evacuation centers. The designated buildings, which are at least four stories high, can accommodate only 10 percent of about 300,000 residents living around them. The municipal government intends to call for the cooperation from owners of private buildings.

The height of the tsunami assumed to follow Tokai and Tonankai earthquakes if they occur in tandem is two to three meters at most. The

city's disaster response office is concerned about what would happen if Tokai, Tonankai and Nankai earthquakes occur in conjunction. "We want the central government to present its estimate of tsunami size soon so that we can reinforce wave barriers and reexamine hazard maps," a city official said.

In Osaka Prefecture where barriers five to six meters high have been built in coastal areas, a possible tsunami is assumed to measure less than three meters high.

In preparation for a huge tsunami, the prefectural government is confirming whether evacuation centers exist in low-lying areas. "Drastic measures will be formulated after the [central] government announces its estimates of the tsunami's size," said an official of the prefectural government's crisis management section.

The government council's expert panel pointed out the need to improve response measures in areas where no tsunami has occurred but the possibility of one happening cannot be ruled out. One such area is the coastal area along the Sea of Japan stretching from the southern part of Akita Prefecture to Yamagata Prefecture.

In Akita Prefecture, tsunami hazard maps have been drawn up in only three of eight cities and towns along the coast of the Sea of Japan. The remaining five cities and towns began compiling maps in the aftermath of the March 11 disaster.

The prefectural government has asked Akita University to study how to deal with elderly people who cannot escape to higher ground and other safe places quickly in times of tsunami.

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<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T110620005368.htm>

Panel urges tsunami defense / Local govts advised to prepare for possible massive disaster

An expert panel under the government's Central Disaster Management Council is urging the central and local governments to prepare for the largest tsunami deemed possible by science.

The proposal was included in the outline of an interim report on anti-tsunami measures compiled by the panel in its third meeting Sunday. Led by Kansai Univ Prof. Yoshiaki Kawata, the panel is expected to release the interim report later this month.

The panel is calling on the central and local governments to drastically

review their conventional anti-tsunami measures, and the proposal is expected to have a significant impact on those measures, observers said.

According to Kawata, past measures against tsunami were drawn up based on the largest tsunami among confirmed cases in the past. Only evidence that was deemed virtually certain was used to determine wave heights.

However, the panel is calling for more importance to be given to research and analysis of tsunami traces left in geological layers and other scientific information.

When compiling antidisaster measures, the panel urged authorities to draw up plans in anticipation of the largest tsunami that can be anticipated from such evidence.

Prior to the March 11 disaster, some local governments in the Tohoku region had drawn up antidisaster plans in anticipation of a magnitude-8 earthquake off Miyagi Prefecture. The area was hit by a magnitude-9 quake in the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Through examination of sediment in old strata, experts concluded that the 869 Jogan tsunami caused about the same level of inundation as the Great East Japan Earthquake. However, local governments were unable to make use of the finding in their anti-tsunami measures in time for the March 11 disaster.

On the Pacific coast of western Japan, it was previously believed that the tsunami observed during the 1707 Hoei earthquake, in which Tokai, Tonankai and Nankai earthquakes occurred in rapid succession, was the largest ever.

However, a recent survey uncovered materials deposited by a tsunami in a geological layer about 2000 years ago at a thickness 2.5 times greater than that left by the Hoei earthquake.

"Previously, we did not take into account something so unlikely [in our prediction]. From now, we'll include undocumented cases as well [in our predictions]."

The panel is expected to compile a final report in autumn.

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<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T110620005178.htm>
