

# Message from the area devastated by the 3.11 TSUNAMI



IWATE

Casualties, missing person 6,093 persons

MIYAGI

Casualties, missing person 15,233 persons

FUKUSHIMA

Casualties, missing person 2,001 persons



The Great East Japan Earthquake was the greatest earthquake that we have experienced in our lifetime. It is a long and arduous process to bring the area to full recovery, but we keep moving forward. We the people of the Pacific side of Tohoku strive together to revive and preserve what we have cherished in the area and realize necessary improvements in the environment to make ourselves feel even more proud of this region.

Miyagi Environmental Life Out-reach Network



# CONTENTS

---

Greeting from President .....	1
Message 1 An ecological lifestyle is resistant to disaster .....	2
Message 2 The rage and blessings of nature: finding the keys for vitalization in traditional Japanese culture .....	3
Message 3 Taking prompt action after disaster: the importance of making close, daily contact.....	5
Message 4 Realizing the sea, rivers and mountains that shape our life.....	7
Message 5 Draw up manually bio-diesel fuel to vehicles for supplying water and emergency relief goods.....	9
Short Messages to Rio+20	



## Greeting from President

---

### Big hopes and big steps to a real sustainable future: Message from the area devastated by the 3.11 Tsunami

Koichi HASEGAWA

(President of Miyagi Environmental Life Out-reach Network, *MELON*)

We are a local environmental NGO called *MELON*, *Miyagi Environmental Life Out-reach Network* with a membership of more than 900. This NGO was established in 1993, the year following the Rio summit. We learned about the role and the purpose of local environmental NGOs from participating in and observing the Rio Summit. Indeed the Rio Summit sowed the seeds of *MELON*. So we are very glad and honored to join Rio+20 with a fruitful 20 years of history.

Unfortunately, our area, Miyagi Prefecture was devastated by the 3.11 earthquake and tsunami. One of our projects\* right after the disaster was interviewing, recording and editing the sufferers' and volunteers' voices after the 3.11 earthquake, tsunami and the Fukushima nuclear accident. This started from mid-April 2011. If you can read Japanese text, please visit the site (<http://www.epo-tohoku.jp/3.11/index.html>) and read the full text version. You will find 41 incredible stories from 45 respondents including volunteers from Miyazaki Prefecture, Kyushu islands and Tokyo. These are real stories of brave people facing so many challenges under emergency situations. The reality was beyond any novel or TV drama. Even now these challenges are continuing. Around 360 thousand people cannot return to their own homes. Most of them are staying in small temporary housing. In Fukushima area, 150 thousand are still living as evacuees as a result of government order or based on their own will to avoid radioactive contamination.

This leaflet includes five stories of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima Prefectures as outstanding examples from the 41 stories. Each essential part was extracted from the original version. Through each story, you will appreciate their braveness, sincerity and energy to survive, working together to rebuild and revitalize their communities. "The 3.11 tsunami devastated everything, but it taught us many important lessons. We should never forget that our life in this coastal area has always been closely related to the sea, rivers and mountains." This is the voice of Mr. HAGA, who survived in the most seriously damaged area, Otsuchi Town. Triggered by the terrible disaster, all of them realized the real meaning of sustainable community life and the value of being with nature. Please listen to the voices from small towns in coastal areas. I believe you will find many great lessons, big steps and big hopes to a real sustainable future.

---

\* This project was conducted by the staff of the Environmental Partnership Office Tohoku, *EPO Tohoku*, affiliated with *MELON* with the financial support of the Ministry of Environment. The English text was translated by Dr. Kumiko Tsuchida, a research fellow of Tohoku University.



## Message 1 An ecological lifestyle is resistant to disaster



### Toru SAKAWA

(Natural Farm *Ureshipamoshiri*,  
Hanamaki City, Iwate)

Brief Introduction: *Ureshipamoshiri* means "Our natural world" in the *Ainu* language. Sakawa has been developing farming based on permaculture, which attempts to create sustainable human settlements and self-maintained agricultural systems modeled on natural ecosystems. He lives true to his beliefs, a life in harmony with ecological cycles and never exploiting the natural world or human effort. He has been devoted to no-till farming since he learned natural farming.

(Interview: September 13, 2011)

#### ■ 14:46, March 11th

A huge earthquake occurred. Although the quake was weaker than the Iwate-Miyagi Nairiku Earthquake in 2008, it lasted longer this time. There was no electricity service for four or five days. We could not use water either. We had a small water well, but it could not be used without an electric pump to draw water. Since my car still had fuel then, I drove to fetch spring water from a nearby stream. In my house, the wood-fired heater and boiler were working. But all of the equipment was off in our parents' house in Kitakami City because everything runs on electricity.

#### ■ In case of emergency...

My business is farming. I was always hoping to adapt my farm to be self sufficient and in harmony with ecological cycles. The Tohoku Earthquake, however, made me recognize that my infrastructure was not sustainable. Since then, I have installed small independent solar panels and started to use a car with two tanks using SVO (it runs on diesel and waste vegetable oil). Now I'm planning to use horses to cultivate my farm.

#### ■ Half a year has passed since the Tohoku Earthquake...

An ecological lifestyle has the advantage of being resistant to disaster. The energy supply should not be over-concentrated in one site. It should be supplied from several small scale facilities even if it would be less efficient in terms of economy. It would be more robust in the event of an emergency. I think the Tohoku Earthquake made us reconsider our lifestyle. A few weeks after the earthquake, I saw many people riding a bicycle and parents and children walking together on the street. Those are normal human activities. I'm hoping that triggered by this earthquake, many people will share the sense that this is a better lifestyle and begin to change.

To change people's mind, it is necessary for them to feel, "this lifestyle is more comfortable." I'm sure it was tough to stay in evacuees' shelters, but sometimes it may have been more fun and comfortable to live together there. I believe some of them probably found it good to live closer together. We have just started to rebuild our new community. I think this is the time for us to find the joy of sharing handmade richness in our life and to shift from lifestyles that are reliant on endless consumption.

## Message 2 The rage and blessings of nature: finding the keys for vitalization in traditional Japanese culture



### Masahiro KURECHI

(President of Japanese Association for Wild Geese Protection, Kurihara City, Miyagi)

#### Brief Introduction:

Wild geese are a popular wild bird in Japan, but their habitats have decreased rapidly in recent years. In order to realize harmonious coexistence between geese and humans, this association fills the rice fields with water during the off-season in winter and attempts to create new habitats for the geese and restore their migration route. In fact, this association has been very active in realizing coexistence between geese and rice farming.

(Interview date: June 25, 2011)

#### ■14:46 March 11 when the earthquake occurred...

On the day before March 11, I attended the first workshop on the coexistence between clams and geese in Teshio Town, Hokkaido. On March 11, I was flying back to Haneda, but the airplane suddenly started circling around above Fukushima. It continued to do so for three hours and then returned to Hokkaido because Haneda Airport was closed as a result of the earthquake. After I returned to the airport in Hokkaido, I saw at the airport lobby the TV news reporting the cars being carried away by the tsunami. Realizing how terrible the situation was, I called home many times, but I could not get through to my family. All of the trains were cancelled. The TV news reported that one train station was flooded. On March 12, I fortunately found an available seat on a flight bound for Haneda, Tokyo, and left Hokkaido.

With clear views from the airplane I found that the coastal landforms had changed: The dykes had collapsed and the water had flooded into the rice fields. The geographical features had completely changed.

From the changes to the scenery, I realized it was very serious. It took me four days to arrive home after the earthquake. Traffic lights and street lamps were all dark because of a blackout in my neighborhood. The cars I saw on the street were all Self-Defence Force officials'. I could not believe it was real.

The stars were very bright at night. I recognized how quickly and completely everything becomes different when the environment changes although it is the same area of mine. It made me recognize how far from nature my lifestyle used to be.

### ■Reconsidering “what are sustainable”

No electricity, water or gas was supplied. Everything was unavailable. The situation was worse for my all-electric house. Not only could I not flush the toilet, I couldn't even open the toilet cover. How fragile high technology is! I realized the risks of seeking only convenience.

I began to reconsider Japanese culture as I saw the effects of the earthquake. As I and my family cleaned up my house after the earthquake, I found many things that I had left in the past. In the process of seeking a more efficient and convenient life, I had left many things behind. My lifestyle used to be more sustainable in the old days. I am now aware that we should return to a lifestyle with low-tech and high sensitiveness to nature.

Natural disasters are unavoidable, but there are keys in our traditional lifestyles to make survival and revitalization possible under severe conditions.

### ■Looking back at the disaster

Until recently I had lived a convenient life pursuing material wealth. Such lifestyle is too fragile to last long. I think that the disaster made many people feel the need to change their way of thinking completely.

We forgot about sustainable life systems, know-how and the cultural climate that had developed in the traditions of Japan. We need to reevaluate and apply them to our new age. We Japanese need to appreciate our culture and tradition, to proudly make the best use of them in society and to change our standards and values. The *Yamato* language, native Japanese language, did not originally have a word to mean “nature” because nature and human beings were not differentiated and humans were regarded as being part of nature. This way of thinking symbolizes how humans were integrated into nature in the Japanese tradition.

We should avoid situations in which people lose control when problems occur such as with nuclear power and genetic recombination. These technologies may be feasible, but they affect the whole of society. Also, we need to develop regulatory systems for society to monitor and control problems in the future.

Humans can never fight against nature. We must engrave this on our heart and never forget it.

We need to use our wisdom to find ways to continuously enjoy the blessings of nature while escaping from its rage. We are part of the Earth, but the Earth is not ours.





## Message 3 Taking prompt action after disaster: the importance of making close, daily contact.



### Yoshio SATOMI

(Spa Hotel *Furutakiya*,  
Iwaki-Yumoto spa town, Iwaki City,  
Fukushima)

Brief Introduction: Yoshio Satomi runs a spa hotel in Iwaki-Yumoto spa town in Fukushima. He promotes the development of the local community and education of people painting a vision of the future one hundred years from now. He, however, has been forced to temporarily close his hotel because of the damage to the building caused by the 3.11 earthquake.

He has engaged in many actions to support and promote the restoration of Iwaki and

Fukushima area after the earthquake. He held events to promote local products in many areas nationwide to support farmers and manufacturers who had been hit hard by rumors about contamination caused by the Fukushima nuclear accident. He also organized a commemorative event and invited Okinawa's traditional performing artists to console the souls of the 3.11 victims as well as to pray for restoration.

(Interview date: August 30, 2011 )

#### ■ Damage caused by the 3.11 and subsequent earthquakes

I was driving a car on a highway when the earthquake occurred. I immediately went and parked in the nearest service area (a place on a highway providing eating and toilet facilities). I realized how serious the situation was when I heard the car radio news report of ten-meter high tsunamis. The streets and highways were all closed. My cell phone was not working. When I finally got through, I asked my acquaintance to let my family and friends know I was safe. I had to stay at my acquaintance's house for two days. I was concerned that our spa town would be forced to close regardless of its 1200-year long history when I knew the water level of the hot spring in Iwaki had fallen by 10 meters.

#### ■ Network through "Onpaku"\*<sup>1</sup>

The mission of "onpaku" which we had held every year since 2008 is one of the ways to revitalize a local community rather than simply to attract tourists. Many people claim that a local community is unattractive, but it is not true. Each local community has its own unique culture and history. Above all, each community is made up of interesting and wonderful people! With our principle of "Polish what we already have", I was planning and conducting projects to revitalize and rebuild our community.

"Onpaku" projects have been held in many spa towns in Japan since 2001. After 3.11, the people in the network of the projects immediately helped us in a very kind and effective manner. A week after the earthquake, the people from Minakami spa town, Gunma whom I had known through the projects came to bring relief supplies. They drove all the way to my town,

\*<sup>1</sup> "Onpaku" is the name of the project that organizes events in spa towns for the purpose of local revitalization.

even though there was not enough gasoline, highways were closed and all of the delivery agents had stopped working because of the nuclear accident in Fukushima. The people in Minakami Town and the town mayor himself collected and brought relief goods. In particular, the mayor budgeted a hundred million yen for supporting Iwaki City. It was because we knew each other through the projects. It was a close tie beyond the boundary of areas.

#### ■ Support activities

It took a while until relief goods were provided in Iwaki City because the nuclear accident made volunteers anxious about coming in. Sales of our products were falling dramatically even though the foods processed and the rice harvested before the earthquake should be completely safe. Rumors are so harmful!

However, there is another case that shows how ties beyond areas play a critical role. More than ten towns and cities in Japan organized fairs selling products from Iwaki City in order to support us as we suffered serious damage caused by rumors. The people in southwestern parts of Japan, which are far away from Tohoku, had not experienced the 3.11 disaster directly, but they shared our feelings after we met and talked.

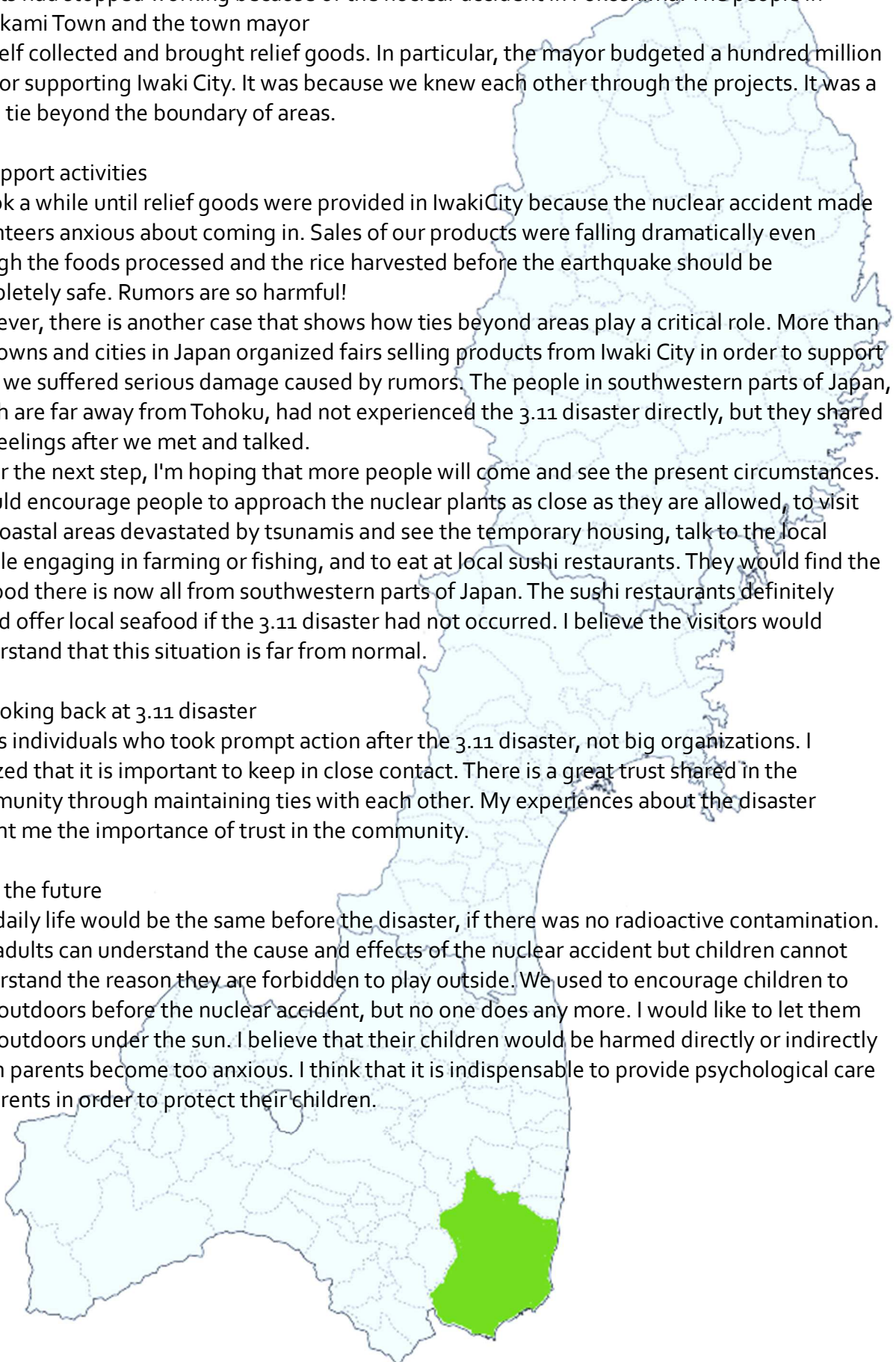
As for the next step, I'm hoping that more people will come and see the present circumstances. I would encourage people to approach the nuclear plants as close as they are allowed, to visit the coastal areas devastated by tsunamis and see the temporary housing, talk to the local people engaging in farming or fishing, and to eat at local sushi restaurants. They would find the seafood there is now all from southwestern parts of Japan. The sushi restaurants definitely would offer local seafood if the 3.11 disaster had not occurred. I believe the visitors would understand that this situation is far from normal.

#### ■ Looking back at 3.11 disaster

It was individuals who took prompt action after the 3.11 disaster, not big organizations. I realized that it is important to keep in close contact. There is a great trust shared in the community through maintaining ties with each other. My experiences about the disaster taught me the importance of trust in the community.

#### ■ To the future

Our daily life would be the same before the disaster, if there was no radioactive contamination. The adults can understand the cause and effects of the nuclear accident but children cannot understand the reason they are forbidden to play outside. We used to encourage children to play outdoors before the nuclear accident, but no one does any more. I would like to let them play outdoors under the sun. I believe that their children would be harmed directly or indirectly when parents become too anxious. I think that it is indispensable to provide psychological care to parents in order to protect their children.



## Message 4 Realizing the sea, rivers and mountains that shape our life

---



### Masahiko HAGA

(NPO Kirikiri-koku, Otsuchi Town, Iwate)

**Brief Introduction:** The local people in Kirikiri area in Otsuchi Town have experienced many natural disasters and have learnt to come to terms with the trials of nature. This NPO was founded after the 3.11 disaster to build a community where local people can engage in risk management by learning how their predecessors coexisted with nature. The mission of this organization is to revitalize this community through creating jobs and making the best use of the blessings from the sea and mountains, which are natural treasures here.

(Interview date: January 24, 2012)

#### ■ 14:46 on March 11th

Our town was struck by fifteen-meter high tsunamis on that day. As I ran from my house, all I could take with me was a radio and cell phone. I rushed to Kirikiri Elementary School and saw the tsunamis sweeping across our town. I watched the whole tsunami, from the first to the last wave. Our town had almost disappeared after all the waves receded. It was just staggering. We lost everything. Individuals, families, everyone in the town, completely gone.

#### ■ Working together with the local people

Men who stayed at evacuees' shelters brought waste timber to each shelter to burn for heating. They also built toilets by digging holes in the schoolyard. Women organized themselves and collected relief goods such as food and blankets from the houses on high ground that escaped the tsunami.

We lost contact with the local governments immediately after the disaster. The local people voluntarily set up a disaster headquarters and took action from the next day. They tried hard to remove debris from national and town roads with the four heavy machines that remained available in the town. At the same time, they searched for missing people and removed debris from the schoolyard to build a heliport. They also carried petroleum and kerosene that were stored underground at gas stations. Three or four days after the disaster the rescue team of the Self-Defense Forces' officers arrived and started all-out emergency support and search for missing people. I can never forget the days of hard work just to survive until the end of March.



### ■ Firewood Project for Restoration

We launched the Firewood for Restoration Project in May. We collected waste timber from the debris, pulled out nails, chopped and packed them into bags to sell. From all over Japan, we received unexpectedly large responses and orders for the firewood, partly because our project was reported by several TV news programs and newspapers.

This is the first project that we undertook to restore the sea and waterfront that used to be so familiar. With our project, we also attempted to make it possible for evacuees to be self-supporting and to rebuild their lives, and to expedite debris removal.

We finished receiving orders for the firewood on September 30th 2011, when we used almost all of the waste timber from the debris. We are currently working on another project called "Forest for Restoration" by tree thinning.

We go to the mountain, improve and thin the woods. I sometimes feel it very hard to work with a chain saw, but thinking of the victims makes me keep at it.

### ■ Looking back at the 3.11 disaster

I think something invisible saved me. I was fortunate enough to survive. I am determined to live a decent life so I do not feel ashamed when I think of local victims.

Our lifestyle had been too dependent on material wealth. Looking back at my life at the shelter, which lasted from March to August, I realized my everyday life before the tsunami struck had been unnecessarily full of material goods and money. A year has passed since the 3.11 disaster, and I am afraid that many people are forgetting what happened last year. Some want to build an imposing house, others want to wear nice clothes. They are just trying to return to their affluent material way of life before the disaster. I am seriously worried what would happen to the next and further generation then a tsunami strikes again.

At the shelter we were provided just a small rice ball for breakfast and a small bean paste bun for lunch everyday. But there was a real community to be shared. This is one of the things we should never forget. I shared the same shelter with people whom I had never talked to before. I think this experience will help us shape real community.

The 3.11 tsunami devastated everything, but it taught us many important lessons. We should never forget that our life in this coastal area is always with the sea, rivers and mountains. We have already learned how to enjoy the blessings of nature because we grew up in this area. I believe this can also be a key to solving the local problems of population decrease and a barely viable community.



## Message 5 Draw up manually bio-diesel fuel to vehicles for supplying water and emergency relief goods



### Nobuya WATANABE

(Shiogama Marine Products Processing Cooperative, Shiogama City, Miyagi)

Brief Introduction: Shiogama Marine Products Processing Cooperative built a refinery for bio-diesel fuel (BDF) in 2005 to produce and sell BDF. The refinery processed waste oil from the frying fish cakes, which are a local specialty food. A total of 190 vehicles including cooperative members' delivery trucks, city's official cars and loop-line busses are running on this BDF. They founded the promotion council for global eco-city Shiogama to tackle local environmental issues. Sixty nine companies participate in this council.

(Interview date: November 21, 2011 )

■ 14:46, March 11

I was in a meeting with municipal staff at Shiogama City Hall when the earthquake occurred. Documents and files fell down from bookshelves and were scattered about. One member of staff tried hard to prevent the TV from falling. After the shaking subsided, an urgent tsunami warning was released, urging people to escape to high ground because ten-meter high tsunami waves were approaching. I first returned to my office with five other members of staff, but then escaped to the nearby drainage facilities that are six meters high. Looking around the street, I found that there was really heavy traffic because many people were driving to escape to high ground or to go home. It was freezing cold and snowing on that day. We brought a diesel electric generator to secure lighting and heating.

Looking at the streets from the rooftop, I saw one of the tsunami waves approach Shiogama Fish Market. By tsunami, cars without passengers were swept in a whirlpool and carried away. Ships were tossed onto land by the waves. Fortunately I did not see people being swept away, but I still could not believe what I saw was real. I was very worried about my wife staying home. It was a few minutes after 7 pm when I finally succeeded in returning home. My neighborhood was all damaged. My house was immersed in water 1.2 meters deep. My wife did not go to the shelter and stayed on the second floor of my house. It was fortunate that all of my family members were safe. My doghouse was pushed up to the top of the fence between my house and the house next door, but miraculously we managed to save all of my four dogs. We spent that night holding each dog.



### ■ Effective BDF made out of local products

On the next day, I went to my office to check the situation and consider what to do. We were requested by Shiogama city to supply the trucks for water supply and emergency relief goods with BDF. We had to manually supply a tanker with BDF because the electricity was still off. We did it in turns, but it took us a great deal of labor. We supplied vehicles with BDF eighty five times until March 29th. It took 4,800 liters in total. Our cooperative normally supplies water to factories, which is one of our primary businesses. This time, we supplied water to people in neighboring areas with a BDF electric generator that we normally use for advertisement. It was fortunate that we stored refined BDF because in winter we collect more waste oil from factories than in other seasons. We could use the BDF at the time of the emergency.

### ■ Half a year has passed since the disaster...

I greatly appreciate the efforts of all the volunteers from other prefectures. They helped us to do many different things and delivered relief goods. It was extraordinarily difficult for our staff to set up an emergency water station to supply water to residents. I am greatly obliged to all of them. We are inclined to forget the disaster as lifelines are restored and our life returns to normal. We must remember that it was very difficult and painful at that moment, although we did not have time to feel it...



## Short Messages to Lio+20 from the area devastated by the 3.11TSUNAMI

---

What we learned from the 3.11 earthquake is the need for every one of us to act today to realize the change we've long dreamed."  
(Y.T)

I still have many things to speak of ...but I do not have words to express them. I'm sorry. Tears still well up when I remember what happened on March 11 by watching TV news or reading news articles. I was deeply touched by people's warmth, consideration, kindness and courage. I really appreciate it.

(D.H)

From the experience of the 3.11 disaster, we realized the kindness and warmth of people. At the same time, however, we need to create an endurable society when an emergency occurs again in the future. Also, we need to create a society that can swiftly recover and rebuild after a disaster. This is necessary not only for Japanese but also for all of the people on the Earth.

(S.S)

Environmental problems remain unsolved today - twenty years after the 1992 Rio Summit. Let's unite efforts from all over the world!

(K.S)

The Old Testament tells that people incurred the wrath of God and were scattered because they were building the Tower of Babel. A nuclear plant might be the Tower of Babel in our time. I hope that Rio+20 will be the time and place for people to unite, not to scatter.

(E.K)

I had a terrible experience when the 3.11 earthquake occurred. But what is more terrible is the greed and self-centered minds of humans who leave the serious climate change and environmental devastation unresolved. I hope that participating countries in the Rio+20 conference will make progressive decisions.

(K.K)

### [ Message from the area devastated by the 3.11TSUNAMI ]

---

Edit&publish : *Miyagi Environmental Life Out-reach Network*  
5F,Forest-Sendai, 1-2-45,Kashiwagi, Aoba-ku, Sendai, JAPAN  
Tel +81-22-276-5118 Fax +81-22-219-5713  
Email : [melon@miyagi.jp](mailto:melon@miyagi.jp)  
Website: <http://www.melon.or.jp/melon/>



This leaflet was an English version selected and extracted from the original Japanese version which was edited by the Environmental Partnership Office Tohoku, *EPO Tohoku*. The EPO Tohoku was managed by an Environmental NGO, Miyagi Environmental Life Out-reach Network, *MELON* in collaboration with the Regional Environment Office of Tohoku area, Ministry of Environment.

