



Emergency Preparedness

International Response Framework: Plan While the Iron Is Cool

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Two and a half years have passed since the March 2011 triple disaster—an earthquake, tsunami, and a nuclear crisis—took place, and Japan is still grappling with substantial post-disaster efforts, including managing radiation-contaminated water and the larger issue of cleaning up and shutting down the nuclear reactors. The U.S., meanwhile, has shifted its focus to address challenges elsewhere in the world. However, it is in this very moment—in the absence of a large-scale, complex foreign disaster—when the U.S. and the international community could benefit from examining and learning lessons from the coordinated response to the March 2011 disaster.

Over the last several months, Banyan Analytics interviewed over a dozen officials who were intimately involved with the Fukushima disaster response. The interviews revealed that out of the over 14 U.S. government agencies involved in the response, those that ordinarily focus on responding to domestic disasters had limited familiarity and experience in working with agencies that focus on responding to international disasters, and vice versa. In Japan, the U.S. government used what it had at its disposal: it applied the National Response Framework in an ad hoc manner, primarily because an organized framework for responding internationally does not yet exist. Given that the Asia-Pacific is the most disaster-prone area of the world, it is probable that U.S. response and assistance will eventually be needed again. When a large-scale disaster does occur, especially one with chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear components (CBRN), it is likely that the U.S. response, in its current state, will encounter the same problems as it did during the response to the Fukushima Daiichi incident. Some have suggested that an international response framework (IRF) drawing upon lessons learned from previous disasters could help the U.S. government organize more effectively and prepare a better response to future emergencies in the Asia-Pacific and around the world.

Image: IAEA Handout Photo.