

# Powerful Quake and Tsunami Devastate Northern Japan



Kyodo News, via Reuters

An area in Sendai City, in northeastern Japan, that had been swept by the tsunami. [More Photos »](#)

By [MARTIN FACKLER](#)  
Published: March 11, 2011

TOKYO — Rescuers struggled to reach survivors on Saturday morning as [Japan](#) reeled after an earthquake and a tsunami struck in deadly tandem. The 8.9-magnitude earthquake set off a devastating tsunami that sent walls of water washing over coastal cities in the north. Concerns mounted over possible radiation leaks from two nuclear plants near the earthquake zone.

### Multimedia

The death toll from the tsunami and earthquake, the strongest ever recorded in Japan, was in the hundreds, but Japanese news media quoted government officials as saying that it would almost certainly rise to more than 1,000. About 200 to 300 bodies

Log in to  
are sha  
Privacy

### What'

Emerg  
Declare  
Japan  
Plant



Log in to  
based on

[Log In](#)

RECOMMEND

TWITTER

COMMENTS

SIGN IN TO E-MAIL

PRINT

SINGLE PAGE

REPRINTS

SHARE



Aftermath of the Earthquake in Japan



Clips of the Earthquake and Tsunami



Interactive Feature

Rescuers Search for Survivors in Japan



Interactive Map

Map of the Damage From the Japanese Earthquake



Interactive Feature

How Shifting Plates Caused the Earthquake and Tsunami in Japan

were found along the waterline in Sendai, a port city in northeastern Japan and the closest major city to the epicenter.

Thousands of homes were destroyed, many roads were impassable, trains and buses were not running, and power and cellphones remained down. On Saturday morning, the JR rail company said that there were three trains missing in parts of two northern prefectures.

While the loss of life and property may yet be considerable, many lives were certainly saved by Japan's extensive disaster preparedness and strict construction codes. Japan's economy was spared a more devastating blow because the earthquake hit far from its industrial heartland.

Japanese officials on Saturday issued broad evacuation orders for people living in the vicinity of two separate nuclear power plants that had experienced breakdowns in their cooling systems as a result of the earthquake, and they warned that small amounts of radiation could leak from both plants.

On Friday, at 2:46 p.m. Tokyo time, the quake struck. First came the roar and rumble of the temblor, shaking skyscrapers, toppling furniture and buckling highways. Then waves as high as 30 feet rushed onto shore, whisking away cars and carrying blazing buildings toward factories, fields and highways.

By Saturday morning, Japan was filled with scenes of desperation, as stranded survivors called for help and rescuers searched for people buried in the rubble. Kazushige Itabashi, an official in Natori City, one of the areas hit hardest by the tsunami, said several districts in an area near Sendai's airport were annihilated.

Rescuers found 870 people in one elementary school on Saturday morning and were trying to reach 1,200 people in the junior high school, closer to the water. There was no electricity and no water for people in shelters. According to a newspaper, the Mainichi Shimbun, about 600 people were on the roof of a public grade school, in Sendai City. By

### [Are You at the Scene? Send In Your Photos](#)

NYTimes.com is compiling photographs from readers in the region affected by the earthquake and tsunami.

[Send Photos](#)

### Related

[Radioactive Element Detected Near Nuclear Plant \(March 13, 2011\)](#)

[The Lede Blog: Updates and Video of the Quake and Tsunami, in Japan and Elsewhere \(March 11, 2011\)](#)

[Times Topic: Tidal Waves and Tsunamis](#)

### Related in Opinion

[Crisis Points: An Unpredictable Test of Japan's Resilience \(March 11, 2011\)](#)

[Crisis Points: In Tokyo, the Search for Solid Ground \(March 11, 2011\)](#)

[Crisis Points: The Internet Kept Me Company \(March 11, 2011\)](#)

[Nicholas D. Kristof Blog: Sympathy for Japan, and Admiration \(March 11, 2011\)](#)

[Enlarge This Image](#)



Kyodo News, via Reuters

Evacuees gathered on Friday in Shinjuku Central Park in Tokyo, hit hard even though it was far from the epicenter. [More Photos »](#)

Saturday morning, Japan's Self-Defense Forces and firefighters had evacuated about 150 of them.

On the rooftop of Chuo Hospital in the city of Iwanuma, doctors and nurses were waving white flags and pink umbrellas, according to TV Asahi. On the floor of the roof, they wrote "Help" in English, and "Food" in Japanese. The reporter, observing the scene from a helicopter, said, "If anyone in the City Hall office is watching, please help them."

The station also showed scenes of people stranded on a bridge, cut off by water on both sides near the mouth of the Abukuma River in Miyagi Prefecture.

People were frantically searching for their relatives. Fumiaki Yamato, 70, was in his second home in a mountain village outside of Sendai when the earthquake struck. He spoke from his car as he was driving toward Sendai trying to find the rest of his family. While it usually takes about an hour to drive to the city, parts of the road were impassable. "I'm getting worried," he said as he pulled over to take a reporter's call. "I don't know how many hours it's going to take."

Japanese, accustomed to frequent earthquakes, were stunned by this one's magnitude and the more than 100 aftershocks, many equivalent to major quakes.

"I never experienced such a strong earthquake in my life," said Toshiaki Takahashi, 49, an official at Sendai City Hall. "I thought it would stop, but it just kept shaking and shaking, and getting stronger."

Train service was shut down across central and northern Japan, including Tokyo, and air travel was severely disrupted.

1 | **2** | [NEXT PAGE »](#)

*Reporting was contributed by Yasuko Kamiizumi from Tokyo; Ken Belson, Maria Newman and Henry Fountain from New York; Daniel Krieger from Osaka, Japan; Kevin Drew and Bettina Wassener from Hong Kong; Alan Cowell and Richard Berry from Paris; Michael Schwirtz from*

*Moscow; Thom Shanker from Washington; Mike Hale from Honolulu; and Elisabeth Bumiller from Brussels.*

INSIDE 1

A version of this article appeared in print on March 12, 2011, on page A1 of the New York edition.

- [COMMENTS](#)
- [SIGN IN TO E-MAIL](#)
- [PRINT](#)
- [SINGLE PAGE](#)
- [REPRINTS](#)



**The Times & the Bay Area - now at 50% off when you subscribe for the convenience of home delivery.**

**Get Free E-mail Alerts on These Topics**

[Tidal Waves and Tsunamis](#)

[Earthquakes](#)

[Japan](#)

[Disasters and Emergencies](#)

MUSIC »



**A Soundtrack to a Meeting That Never Was**

N.Y. / REGION »



**Art Moves From the Garage to the Gallery**

SPORTS »



**After Losing Their Ace, Rangers Try Plan B**

OPINION »

**Dick Cavett: My Life as a Juvenile Delinquent**  
Many years later, the author reckons with a youthful escapade, and the matter of crime and punishment.

BOC



**Dav Hu**

[Home](#) | [World](#) | [U.S.](#) | [N.Y. / Region](#) | [Business](#) | [Technology](#) | [Science](#) | [Health](#) | [Sports](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Arts](#) | [Style](#) |

© 2011 The New York Times Company | [Privacy](#) | [Your Ad Choices](#) | [Terms of Service](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [E](#)