

Characteristics of precursory volcanic earthquakes to eruptions at the Showa crater of Sakurajima volcano

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Sakurajima is a post-caldera cone situated on the southern rim of Aira caldera, south Kyushu, Japan. Vulcanian eruptions have occurred at the Minamidake crater at the summit since 1955. Principal eruptive activity shifted to the Showa crater at the eastern flank of the summit in 2006. The eruptions at the crater become active and minor vulcanian eruptions occurred about 1,000 times per year in 2010-2012. Inflationary strain changes are observed by extensometers a few tens of minutes to several hours prior to the eruptions and are caused by pressure sources located at depths of 0-1.5 km (Iguchi et al., 2013). The inflation rates decrease or sometimes suspend about 30 minutes before the eruptions. Small earthquakes dominated by high frequency components (5-6 Hz) swarm when duration of inflation is longer than 1 hour. The earthquakes begin to occur a half hour to 1 hour after the start of the inflation. The amplitudes and number of the earthquakes further increase when the inflation rates decrease or suspend. And, the occurrences of the earthquakes suddenly stop at the start of the eruptions. The occurrences of the earthquake swarms are related to the decrease of inflation rate and the long inflation. The hypocenters of the earthquakes are located at a depth of 0.5 km beneath the crater and are close to depth of the pressure source. The precursory earthquakes may be generated by release of excess pressure accumulated by inflation of the pressure source. The earthquakes are similar to BH-type earthquakes during the eruptive activity of the Minamidake crater in waveforms and relation of the inflationary deformation, however the earthquakes are different in amplitude, patten of occurrence and direct precursor of eruptions.

Keywords: Sakurajima volcano, explosive eruption, precursory earthquake