

Advancing disaster preparedness in Okinawa Prefecture

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Okinawa Prefecture located in the south-westernmost part of Japanese Islands and in the subtropical area is often attacked by characteristic natural disasters which are different from the other areas in Japan, such as, destructive typhoons after passing the Western Pacific Warm Pool, high tide due to typhoons and warm water eddies, many earthquakes of both plate convergent type and due to active across-arc fault slip, most of them may induce tsunamis because their hypocentres are mostly sub-seafloor. Disaster preparedness, especially in Okinawa Prefecture is to be taught at the school education. Currently, 'Home Economics' is the only subject in which disaster preparedness is taught in junior and senior high schools in Japan. Therefore the articles on disaster preparedness in the current official textbooks on 'Home Economics' for junior and senior high school education were investigated in order to search if they contain descriptions enough to fulfil the disaster preparedness education in these schools. The results, however, show that the description in all the official textbooks was poor and that the volume of the description was half page in the minimum case and two pages even in the maximum case. The authors therefore started the following practice to fulfil the disaster preparedness education at schools.

A brochure to explain the nature of these natural disasters characteristic of Okinawa Prefecture and to teach how to prepare for the natural disasters was printed for auxiliary materials for school education. It includes the aspects of both natural science (earth science) and home economics, such as preparedness in the viewpoint of food clothing and shelter.

Japanese government established the system for renewing educational personnel certificates in 2007 and mandated the adoption of it in April 2009. The new system shows that only persons who have attended the certificate renewal courses over 30 hours and passed the examination before the expiration of the valid period can renew their certificate which is valid for next ten years. The purpose of this system is for teachers to acquire the latest knowledge and skills. Since 2012, the author has offered a 6-hour certificate renewal course titled by 'Disaster preparedness in Okinawa ? practicing development of teaching materials for school pupils'. This course was targeted mainly for science and home economics teachers of junior and senior high schools to tell the school pupils how to save their lives in case of devastated natural disasters.