

"The Earthquake and Persons with Disabilities"

(3) Support During Disasters for Persons with Disabilities and Protection of Personal Information

With the development of our information society, the protection of personal information has become an important issue and led to the enactment of the Personal Information Protection Act.

Needless to say, disabilities such as physical disabilities, intellectual disabilities, mental disorders are strictly confidential personal information protected by the government and the government shall never disclose such information without the consent of the individual concerned.

However, in the Great East Japan Earthquake, there were many cases where organizations of and for persons with disabilities asked the basic local governments of cities, towns, and villages, to disclose information about persons with disabilities.

It was difficult for most of the cities, towns and villages to respond to these requests due to the rules concerning the protection of personal information.

Under such circumstances, many of the cities, towns, and villages of the coastal regions of Fukushima Prefecture had to cope with disasters caused by not only the Earthquake and tsunami, but also the accident, which occurred at the Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant run by TEPCO.

Organizations of and for persons with disabilities asked Minamisoma City to disclose personal information about persons with disabilities taking the stance of asking for "disclosure due to emergency". The city judged that in terms of "securing the lives and bodies, and properties of persons with disabilities", disclosing such information was appropriate.

In Minamisoma City, safety confirmation and evacuation of users of welfare services for persons with disabilities such as inpatient facilities, outpatient facilities and home help was conducted at each facility respectively. However, it was initially not possible to verify the safety of individuals using home help services and homebound persons with disabilities

Among those disable persons who do not use such services, Minamisoma City disclosed the information of people with physical and intellectual disabilities, through the cooperation of the specified nonprofit corporation Center Support Peers and the JDF Fukushima Support Center for Persons with disabilities, the city was able to confirm the safety of 590 people.

Regarding persons with mental disorders, health nurses of the city and the prefecture conducted their safety confirmation by looking at whether outpatient mental medical service recipients continued to receive mental treatment.

(Please refer to page 29 for the report by Minamisoma City.)

(In this column, we received the cooperation of the Health Welfare Dept. of Minamisoma City)