

1,000 Rice Balls Made in a Dark Meeting Hall Residents of Inland Areas



▲ Residents living inland from the coast immediately worked together to make onigiri rice balls for delivery to evacuation sites using stockpiled rice, well water, and propane gas.

Because of the tsunami damage Minamisanriku had suffered in the past, the town has been running disaster-prevention drills for the entire community. These have included emergency drills for food preparation and distribution at meeting halls in all parts of the town. Since ancient times, the Minamisanriku people have also practiced the tradition of collectively preparing the food eaten at ceremonial occasions. With regular disaster-prevention drills, regional events, festivals, and so on, the community has amassed extensive experience in the communal preparation and distribution of food. People have become used to working cooperatively and efficiently to produce large quantities of onigiri rice balls.

At the time of the Great East Japan Earthquake, residents of inland areas quickly understood from the severity of the quake and the tsunami warnings that emergency food-distribution efforts were required. Despite disruptions to both communications and power, they managed to contact each other and gather in meeting halls, bringing food that had been stockpiled. Using flashlights and candles for light as they worked, they prepared large amounts of onigiri rice balls. Emergency food for community distribution was also being prepared by people in evacuation sites.

Supplies of white rice quickly ran out, however. While brown rice was available, it could not be polished due to the loss of power. Creative solutions were found by polishing rice using the motive power of agricultural machinery, enabling the continued distribution of food to evacuees.

Electricity supply was restored to Minamisanriku in mid-May 2011, with the water coming on in August of the same year.