

Tearing Oneself Away from One's Hometown

The option of secondary evacuation



▲ Mayor Jin Sato waving goodbye to townspeople temporarily relocating from Minamisanriku. (April 21, 2011)

With the severity of the damage suffered in Minamisanriku, evacuation centers were forced to accommodate a far greater number of people than they were designed to. Support was urgently requested from neighboring municipalities that could offer a normal living environment to evacuees on a temporary basis. In Minamisanriku itself, the Minamisanriku Hotel Kanyo offered its space to about 600 people. With the inland cities of Tome, Kurihara, and Osaki announcing that they would accept secondary evacuees, a residents' briefing was held on March 26th, 2011, in order to implement a mass evacuation.

Minamisanriku residents had various concerns that made the decision to leave a difficult one. Some wanted to wait for missing family members. Others had concerns about whether their children would be able to go to school or how their family members would be able to make hospital visits. Thoughts about leaving one's familiar living environment and becoming a secondary evacuee in a place full of strangers created anxiety, especially for elderly residents.

A survey was conducted to learn about people's intentions; then, on April 3rd, a first group, comprising 500 people, was evacuated to the cities of Tome, Kurihara, Osaki, and the township of Kami. Working in coordination with travel agencies, Miyagi Prefecture arranged a shuttle bus and allocated rooms in a hot springs resort that became a secondary evacuation area. In Minamisanriku, public health nurses performed medical checks—with priority given to people in need of nursing care or who made regular hospital visits—before sending off the evacuees.

Naruko Onsen accepted more than 800 evacuees. Places outside Miyagi Prefecture, such as Yamagata Prefecture, also accepted secondary evacuees. During the peak period of mid-May 2011, Minamisanriku had a total of 2,755 secondary evacuees.