

## Sharing a Lesson about Protecting Lives with the Whole Country A firm pledge to their colleagues who died in the line of duty



▲ Then chief of the fire station holding his hands in prayer in front of the completely destroyed fire station

Photo courtesy of Kesenuma-Motoyoshi Regional Administrative Union Fire Department Headquarters

On March 11th, 2011, a huge tsunami that far exceeded expectations surged deep inland, killing nine firefighters who were engaged in disaster response.

This tragic incident prompted firefighters to ask themselves, "Why did my colleagues have to lose their lives?" "How should we do rescue work in life-threatening situations?"

The details of the incident were analyzed by the Committee for Verification and Prevention of Recurrence of Tsunami Accidents among Firefighters that was set up seven months after the disaster. It was revealed that firefighters tend to be less likely to perceive the threat to their own lives because of a sense of mission to fulfill orders and a sense of duty to save the people in front of them, resulting in their own delayed evacuation.



▲ At the time of the disaster, the Minamisanriku Fire Station was located outside the anticipated flooding area.

Photo courtesy of Geospatial Information Authority of Japan

You can only save the lives of others if you stay alive yourself. The firefighters were reminded that rescue work must be carried out only after first ensuring the safety of their own lives. The understandings that were reached by these Minamisanriku firefighters and the resolutions that they made came to be shared all across the country, prompting a reexamination of the fundamentals of rescue operations at fire stations nationwide.

Feeling deep sorrow for the loss of their comrades, the firefighters continue to bring the issue to attention: "Disasters can occur at any time. In a disaster situation, please value your own safety."