

Section 2 Publication of Names and other information of Persons Whose Safety is Unknown at the Time of Disaster

In the event of a disaster, in order to contribute to the efficiency and facilitation of rescue activities, in some cases, local governments will publicize the names of persons whose safety is unknown (hereinafter referred to as "publication of names and other information") and seek information on their safety widely in order to narrow down the list of persons to be rescued. Since names and other information are personal information, with taking into consideration their own personal information protection ordinances, each local government determines whether or not to disclose names and other information according to the circumstances of the disaster, affected persons and other factors.

On July 3, 2021, a massive debris flow occurred in the Izusan area of Atami City, Shizuoka Prefecture. Since it was initially difficult to accurately assess the extent of damage, Atami City identified 130 damaged buildings based on maps and field checks and recognized 217 residents from 128 households in the affected area by checking with the Basic Resident Register, which led them to confirm their safety. Based on the results, on the evening of the 5th, the Shizuoka Prefecture Disaster Management Headquarters announced the names of 64 people whose safety was unknown and solicited information from a wide range of sources. Thereafter, contact was made by the missing persons themselves or their acquaintances, and the number of missing persons decreased to 25 on the morning of the 6th. Sequentially thereafter, the addresses of persons whose safety was unknown were identified and plotted on a map to focus the area of rescue and search activities.

Based on this case, on September 16, 2021, the Cabinet Office, jointly with the Fire and Disaster Management Agency, issued a notice entitled "Publication of Names and other information of Persons Whose Safety is Unknown at the Time of Disaster" to the chief of each prefectural disaster management department. This informed local governments of the matters they should keep in mind when they publicize names and other information. The main contents of the notice were as follows.

- In the event of a disaster, the publication of names and other information may contribute to the efficiency and facilitation of lifesaving activities, and the first 72 hours since the occurrence of disaster are extremely important. Accordingly, a series of procedures for the publication of names and other information should be considered from ordinary times in cooperation with municipalities and relevant organizations.
- It is basically prefectures that should publicize the names and other information. However, in case where it is considered useful to have municipalities collect safety information, it may be possible for municipalities to do so based on the prior coordination.
- In case where it is important to improve the efficiency of rescue operations by publicizing names and other information, personal information is considered to be provided when it is urgently necessary for the protection of human life or body. From this perspective, consideration should be given to the application of the exceptions to the restrictions on the use and provision of personal information as stipulated in the Ordinance on the Protection of Personal Information.
- To prevent disadvantage to those who need to keep their whereabouts confidential, such as victims of spousal violence or stalking, confirmation must be made with the municipality concerned before a public announcement.

As of December 1, 2021, 30 of the prefectures have established policies for the publication of names and other information.

For the purpose of formulating "Guidelines for the Handling of Personal Information in the Field of Disaster Risk Reduction" that outline the scope of use and points to be noted by the end of FY2022 in case personal information is handled by local governments in disaster response and in preparations during ordinary-time, the committee of experts has been in operation since March 2022 (See Special Feature, Chapter 3, Section 4, 4-1 (2) 2.). And it has also been discussing the publication of names and other information.