

# Tokyo's Teamwork Approach to Safety and Security

Tokyo, and Japan in general, has a deserved, globally recognized reputation as being one of the safest places in the world. However, the Tokyo Fire Department is always raising their game.



Fire Rescue Task Forces the 6<sup>th</sup> Fire District HQ Team about to start training exercises.

One outstanding example of the steps taken by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government toward achieving the highest level of safety possible is the Fire Rescue Task Forces, also known as Hyper Rescue. After the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake that struck Kobe in western Japan in 1995, it became clear that highly advanced rescue units utilizing special skill sets and equipment would be needed to tackle future large-scale disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, fires, and terrorism, more effectively.

Tokyo is divided into 10 fire districts. Hyper Rescue units are strategically located in five of them so they can offer better protection to all of Tokyo. Additionally, there is an aviation unit specializing in skyscraper disaster rescue activities. The super men and women that make up these Hyper Rescue units are divided into four disciplines



The remotely operated water discharging "Dragon" being deployed.

The powerful "Two-Armed Debris Remover" in action.

focused on rescue, hazardous materials, specialized machinery, and on-scene first aid activities. This maximizes the Tokyo Fire Department's efficiency across the widest range of scenarios. Their skills are not just for large-scale disasters though; they can also be deployed to assist regular emergency crews in local neighborhoods. Also, they are not limited to the boundaries of the administrative area of Tokyo, they cooperate in relief activities in Japan and around the world. They were deployed to Mexico after the earthquake disaster there in 2017.

The breezy residential area of Adachi Ward, on the banks of the Arakawa River in the northeastern part of Tokyo, is home to the 6<sup>th</sup> Fire District Headquarters of the Fire Rescue Task Forces. Specializing in large-scale earthquake disaster and flood damage response, the 20-strong team undergo rigorous daily training in order to be in optimum condition, ready to be called upon at any given moment.

They are constantly learning from every disaster

situation, honing their skills and adjusting their tactics accordingly, thanks to the extensive on-site training facilities that simulate many different types of disaster sites. "We work as a team and our aim is to tackle and handle every disaster situation," says the mobility department captain. "We are continuing training so that we can rescue safely, promptly and reliably while taking into consideration the needs of the victims and evacuees," he explains. "We train a lot, 10 times a month on a 24-hour basis with three shifts working ... depending on the content, we might easily train for more than 10 hours straight in one session."

Equally impressive are the state-of-the-art machinery, equipment, and vehicles available to the units, including remote-controlled options. Areas and situations that are difficult to access due to high temperatures, poor visibility, or toxic gases and the like are always a concern. Fortunately, two assets collectively known as "Dual Fighter" can help out: "Saver" (for obstacle removal) and "Dragon" (for

firefighting)—which has a self-defense spray to protect itself from fire and can discharge water or foam up to 5,000 liters per minute. Both can be remotely operated from up to 100 meters away. Looking like something out of a science fiction movie, the "Two-Armed Debris Remover" is another valuable asset. Its dynamic dual arms and claws allow it to lift and move heavy objects. An experienced operator can use it to hold things with one arm and cut with the other—it is incredibly useful for dismantling damaged roofs and pillars.

Over the next couple of years, Japan is going to find itself the focus of much of the world's attention as the host nation for both the Rugby World Cup 2019™ and the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020. The well-being of visitors to the capital and its citizens has always been a high priority for the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. Everyone can rest easier knowing that any potential disaster can be met head-on and tackled successfully by the highly skilled and dedicated teams of Tokyo's Fire Rescue Task Forces.