

Backgrounder: The Great East Japan Earthquake and 3.11

The magnitude-9.0 Great East Japan Earthquake hit Japan on March 11, 2011, triggering a powerful tsunami. The tsunami hit the northeastern Tōhoku region, destroying thousands of homes, and sparked the explosion of a nuclear power plant in Fukushima prefecture. The triple disaster of earthquake, tsunami and plant explosion has become known in Japan as “3.11”, paralleling the immortalisation of the 9/11 attacks in Western popular consciousness. 2016 marks the fifth anniversary of these events.

Statistics

Time of Earthquake	2:46pm on March 11, 2011
Epicentre	130km ESE of Oshika Peninsula, Miyagi prefecture (Source: JMA 2016)
Max. Fault Slippage	20-30 metres (Source: TDTB n.d.)
Max. Tsunami Height	Over 9.3m (Max. Run-up Height: 40+ metres) (Sources: JMA 2016; MLIT n.d./MEXT 2011)
Inundated area	535 sq. km (Source: MLIT n.d.)
Dead/Missing Persons	18,457 (Dead: 15,894; Missing: 2,563) (Source: NPAJ 2016)
Damage to Buildings	121,283 buildings destroyed; an additional 1,074,760 damaged (Source: NPAJ 2016)
Number of Evacuees	Peaked at 470,000. Now 182,000 (as of January 2016) (Source: Reconstruction Agency 2016)
Areas Hardest Hit	Miyagi, Iwate and Fukushima prefectures

In Context

- Largest earthquake on record in Japan (Source: JMA 2016)
- 4th-largest earthquake in the world since 1900 (Source: MLIT 2011)
- Greatest disaster to befall Japan since World War II (Source: TDTB n.d.)
- Geological records and historical documents indicate that the last tsunami of similar magnitude to occur in Japan was in 869 CE (Source: Goto et al. 2012)

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