

# New tremors raise concern at Japan's Mount Ontake

September 30 2014, by Emily Wang

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An aerial view shows volcanic smoke and fume raising from craters of Mount Ontake, central Japan, Tuesday, Sept. 30, 2014. Toxic gases and ash from still-erupting Mount Ontake forced Japanese rescue workers to call off the search for more victims Monday as dozens of relatives awaited news of their family members. (AP Photo/Kyodo News)

Increased seismic activity raised concern Tuesday about the possibility of another eruption at a Japanese volcano where 36 people were killed, forcing rescuers to suspend plans to try to recover at least two dozen

bodies still near the summit.

Volcanic tremors rose to a level not seen since Saturday evening, hours after Mount Ontake's initial large [eruption](#), said Shoji Saito of the Japan Meteorological Agency. The tremor levels were oscillating up and down.

"At this point, anything can happen," Saito said, though he stopped short of predicting another large eruption.

About 80 to 100 relatives and friends of those who never returned from the summit were waiting for news in a municipal hall in the nearby central Japanese town of Kiso.

Rescuers found five more bodies on Monday, bringing the death toll to 36. They have managed to airlift only 12 bodies off the mountain since the start of the eruption on Saturday because of dangerous conditions.

There were believed to be at least 250 people on the mountain, a popular hiking destination, when it erupted.

How the victims died remains unclear, though experts say it was probably from suffocating ash, falling rocks, toxic gases or some combination of them. Some of the bodies had severe contusions.

Survivors told Japanese media that they were pelted by rocks from the eruption.

Yuji Tsuno, a veteran mountain photographer, was near the summit. After taking pictures of the initial explosion as ash and debris rained down, he quickly took refuge in a nearby hut, he told the TBS TV network.



Dense white plumes of gases and ash are spewed out from the summit crater of Mount Ontake, central Japan, Monday afternoon, Sept. 29, 2014. Japanese soldiers managed to bring down eight more bodies by helicopter from the ash-blanketed peak of a still-erupting volcano on Monday, before toxic gases and ash forced them to suspend the recovery effort in the early afternoon. (AP Photo/Kyodo News)

About 20 minutes later, when the smoke partially subsided, Tsuno rushed out and began his descent. It was a gamble, but he believed it was his only chance, he said.

"I almost thought it was the end of my life," he said in the interview.

On his way down, he spotted a man heading up. "I told him to go down with me, but he said he had to check on his child up there. I couldn't stop

him," Tsuno said.



Autumn leaves cover the slopes of Mount Ontake as white plumes of gases and ash are spewed out from the summit crater, central Japan, Monday afternoon, Sept. 29, 2014. Japanese soldiers managed to bring down eight more bodies by helicopter from the ash-blanketed peak of a still-erupting volcano on Monday, before toxic gases and ash forced them to suspend the recovery effort in the early afternoon. (AP Photo/Kyodo News)

The eruption caught seismologists by surprise. Although somewhat increased [seismic activity](#) had been recorded for about two weeks, there were no indications of a [major eruption](#), said Satoshi Deguchi, a Japan Meteorological Agency official in Nagano prefecture. Typical signs, such as increased seismic rattling or underground structural movement, were not detected.

The eruption was the first fatal one in modern times at the 3,067-meter (10,062-foot) mountain, located about 210 kilometers (130 miles) west of Tokyo. An eruption occurred in 1979, but no one died.



Firefighters raise a blue sheet as a body of a hiker trapped in the mountaintop area during the eruption of Mount Ontake is airlifted by a Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force helicopter in Otaki in Nagano Prefecture, central Japan, Monday, Sept. 29, 2014. Japanese soldiers managed to bring down eight more bodies by helicopter from the ash-blanketed peak of a still-erupting volcano on Monday, before toxic gases and ash forced them to suspend the recovery effort in the early afternoon. (AP Photo/Kyodo News)



An aerial view shows mountain lodges with heavily damaged roof top in the erupted Mount Ontake, central Japan, Monday, Sept. 29, 2014. Japanese soldiers managed to bring down eight more bodies by helicopter from the ash-blanketed peak of a still-erupting volcano on Monday, before toxic gases and ash forced them to suspend the recovery effort in the early afternoon.(AP Photo/Kyodo News)



In this photo taken Sunday, Sept. 28, 2014 and released by the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF), JGSDF personnel and fire fighters head for the summit of Mount Ontake to rescue people who have been trapped in the mountaintop lodge during the eruption as plumes of gas and ash are spewed out, one day after the volcano became active in central Japan. Five more bodies have been found near the summit of a Japanese volcano, bringing the total presumed dead to dozens. But toxic gases and ash from the still-erupting mountain have forced rescue workers Monday, Sept. 29 to halt efforts to recover the victims. (AP Photo/The Japan Ground Self-Defense Force)



In this photo taken Sunday, Sept. 28, 2014 and released by the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF), JGSDF personnel and fire fighters carry a person who was injured in the eruption of Mount Ontake on a stretcher from the peak area of the volcanic mountain in central Japan. Five more bodies have been found near the summit of a Japanese volcano, bringing the total presumed dead to dozens. But toxic gases and ash from the still-erupting mountain have forced rescue workers Monday, Sept. 29 to halt efforts to recover the victims. (AP Photo/The Japan Ground Self-Defense Force)

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