

Fierce heatwave hits Japan flood recovery

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A blistering heatwave smothered swathes of flood-hit western Japan Monday, hampering clean-up efforts as survivors and relief workers toil in stifling temperatures a week after devastating inundations that killed

more than 200 people.

Tens of thousands of rescue workers are still digging through the debris for bodies after Japan's worst weather-related disaster in over three decades, which saw record downpours spark flash flooding and landslides across the region.

The toll of 219 is expected to continue to rise, with at least 21 still missing, while the punishing heatwave has pushed the thermometer above 35C (95F) and raised fears for vulnerable people.

Some 4,700 survivors were forced to evacuate the disaster area, where homes were reduced to rubble by the floods and landslides.

Many remain in shelters, while others have been left without water supply.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga warned survivors, volunteers and the 64,000 [rescue workers](#) in the [disaster zone](#) of the dangers of heatstroke.

"We are operating in tough conditions, with a [severe heatwave](#) in this region," Koji Kunitomi, a spokesman at the disaster management department in flood-hit Okayama prefecture, told AFP.

Sweltering summer weather has swept across Japan in recent days, sending temperatures surging just days after the record rainfall.



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The country's meteorological agency has warned that the heat is "more severe" than normal, with temperatures in Okayama hitting a high of 36.8C on Monday, compared to an average high of 31C in the city.

On Sunday, local media reported that three people had died and more than 2,000 were sent to hospital across the nation due to heatstroke.

Television footage of the relief efforts in western Japan showed survivors and volunteers struggling to clear debris under the intense sun.

The body of one victim covered in a blue tarpaulin was carried from a

destroyed house in Aki, Hiroshima on Monday.

The scale of the toll from the floods has prompted questions about whether authorities were properly prepared and acted effectively.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has pledged support for [survivors'](#) businesses, including to provide interest-free loans to farmers in the region.

"I want to take concrete measures to help people in the [disaster areas](#) revive their livelihoods as quickly as possible," Abe told his ministers and government officials in Tokyo.

The government has assessed agricultural losses of at least 48 billion yen (\$429 million), according to Suga.

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