

Powerful earthquakes leave at least 55 dead, destroy buildings along Japan's western coast

January 2 2024, by HIRO KOMAE and YURI KAGEYAMA



People walk by a building collapsed following an earthquake in Shikamachi, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. A series of powerful earthquakes in western Japan damaged homes, cars and boats, with officials warning people on Tuesday to stay away from their homes in some areas because of a continuing risk of major quakes and tsunamis. Credit: Kyodo News via AP

A series of powerful earthquakes that hit western Japan have left at least

55 people dead and damaged thousands of buildings, vehicles and boats. Officials warned Tuesday that more quakes could lie ahead.

Aftershocks continued to shake Ishikawa prefecture and nearby areas a day after a magnitude 7.6 temblor slammed the area.

Damage was so great that it could not immediately be assessed. Japanese media reports said tens of thousands of homes were destroyed.

Government spokesperson Yoshimasa Hayashi said 17 people were seriously injured and gave a slightly lower death toll, saying he was aware of the prefecture's tally.

Water, power and cell phone service were still down in some areas. Residents expressed sorrow about their uncertain futures.

"It's not just that it's a mess. The wall has collapsed, and you can see through to the next room. I don't think we can live here anymore," Miki Kobayashi, an Ishikawa resident, said as she swept around her house.

The house was also damaged in a 2007 quake, she said.

Although casualty numbers continued to climb gradually, the prompt public warnings, relayed on broadcasts and phones, and the quick response from the general public and officials appeared to have limited some of the damage.



A building falls on the ground following an earthquake in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. A series of major earthquakes started a fire and collapsed buildings on the west coast of Japan's main island, Honshu. Credit: Kyodo News via AP

Toshitaka Katada, a University of Tokyo professor specializing in disasters, said people were prepared because the area had been hit by quakes in recent years. They had evacuation plans and emergency supplies in stock.

"There are probably no people on Earth who are as disaster-ready as the Japanese," he told The Associated Press.

Japan is frequently hit by earthquakes because of its location along the "Ring of Fire," an arc of volcanoes and fault lines in the Pacific Basin.

Katada warned the situation remains precarious and unpredictable. The March 2011 quake and tsunami in northeastern Japan had been preceded by other quakes.

"This is far from over," Katada said.

Predictions by scientists have repeatedly been proven wrong, such as with the 2016 quake in southwestern Kumamoto, an area previously seen as relatively quake-free.



A house damaged by an earthquake sits in Nanao, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. A series of powerful earthquakes hit western Japan, damaging buildings, vehicles and boats, with officials warning people in some areas on Tuesday to stay away from their homes because of a continuing risk of

major quakes. Credit: Kyodo News via AP

"Having too much confidence in the power of science is very dangerous. We are dealing with nature," Katada said.

Japanese media's aerial footage showed widespread damage in the hardest-hit spots, with landslides burying roads, boats tossed in the waters and a fire that had turned an entire section of Wajima city to ashes.

Japan's military dispatched 1,000 soldiers to the disaster zones to join rescue efforts, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said Tuesday.

"Saving lives is our priority and we are fighting a battle against time," he said. "It is critical that people trapped in homes get rescued immediately."

A quake with a preliminary magnitude of 5.6 shook the Ishikawa area as he was speaking. Quakes continued to rock the area, reaching more than 100 aftershocks over the past day.

Nuclear regulators said several nuclear plants in the region were operating normally. A major quake and tsunami in 2011 caused three reactors to melt and release large amounts of radiation at a nuclear plant in northeastern Japan.



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On Monday, the Japan Meteorological Agency issued a major tsunami warning for Ishikawa and lower-level tsunami warnings or advisories for the rest of the western coast of Japan's main island of Honshu, as well as for the northern island of Hokkaido.

The warning was downgraded several hours later, and all tsunami warnings were lifted as of early Tuesday. Waves measuring more than

one meter (3 feet) hit some places.

Still, half-sunken ships floated in bays where tsunami waves had rolled in, leaving a muddied coastline.

People who were evacuated from their houses huddled in auditoriums, schools and community centers. Bullet trains in the region were halted, but service was mostly restored by Tuesday afternoon. Sections of highways were closed.

Weather forecasters predicted rain, setting off worries about crumbling buildings and infrastructure.



Houses fallen by an earthquake are seen in Kanazawa, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. A series of powerful earthquakes in western Japan

damaged homes, cars and boats, with officials warning people on Tuesday to stay away from their homes in some areas because of a continuing risk of major quakes and tsunamis. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



Smoke rises from the site of a fire occurred following an earthquake in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. A series of powerful earthquakes in western Japan left at least four people dead and damaged homes, cars and boats, with officials warning people on Tuesday to stay away from their homes in some areas because of a continuing risk of major quakes and tsunamis. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



A vehicle sits underneath a building collapsed following an earthquake in Shikamachi, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. A series of powerful earthquakes in western Japan damaged homes, cars and boats, with officials warning people on Tuesday to stay away from their homes in some areas because of a continuing risk of major quakes and tsunamis. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



A car is trapped at a partially collapsed road caused by a powerful earthquake near Anamizu Town, Ishikawa Prefecture Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. A series of powerful earthquakes hit western Japan, damaging buildings, vehicles and boats, with officials warning people in some areas on Tuesday to stay away from their homes because of a risk of more strong quakes. Credit: AP Photo/Hiro Komae



A woman walks in front of collapsed houses following earthquake in Noto-cho, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. A series of powerful earthquakes hit western Japan, damaging buildings, vehicles and boats, with officials warning people in some areas on Tuesday to stay away from their homes because of a risk of more strong quakes. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, second from left, speaks at a disaster response meeting at his office in Tokyo Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. A series of powerful earthquakes hit western Japan, damaging buildings, vehicles and boats, with officials warning people in some areas on Tuesday to stay away from their homes because of a continuing risk of major quakes. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



People walk through the damaged marketplace burnt by fire after earthquake in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. A series of powerful earthquakes hit western Japan, damaging buildings, vehicles and boats, with officials warning people in some areas on Tuesday to stay away from their homes because of a risk of more strong quakes. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



A man carries his belongings past a collapsed house following an earthquake in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. A series of powerful earthquakes hit western Japan, damaging buildings, vehicles and boats, with officials warning people in some areas on Tuesday to stay away from their homes because of a risk of more strong quakes. (Kyodo News via AP) Credit: Kyodo News via AP



A traffic jam is seen on a partially collapsed road caused by powerful earthquake near Anamizu Town, Ishikawa Prefecture Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. A series of powerful earthquakes hit western Japan, damaging buildings, vehicles and boats, with officials warning people in some areas on Tuesday to stay away from their homes because of a risk of more strong quakes. Credit: AP Photo/Hiro Komae



A building falls on the ground following an earthquake in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. A series of major earthquakes started a fire and collapsed buildings on the west coast of Japan's main island, Honshu. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



A damaged road is seen following an earthquake in Anamizumachi, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. A series of powerful earthquakes hit western Japan, damaging buildings, vehicles and boats, with officials warning people in some areas on Tuesday to stay away from their homes because of a continuing risk of major quakes. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



A house damaged by an earthquake sits in Nanao, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. A series of powerful earthquakes in western Japan damaged homes, cars and boats, with officials warning people on Tuesday to stay away from their homes in some areas because of a continuing risk of major quakes and tsunamis. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



Fishing boats are overturned at a port in Shikamachi, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. A series of powerful earthquakes in western Japan damaged homes, cars and boats, with officials warning people on Tuesday to stay away from their homes in some areas because of a continuing risk of major quakes and tsunamis. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



A burnt car and debris are seen at a marketplace after a fire following strong earthquake in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. A series of powerful earthquakes hit western Japan, damaging buildings, vehicles and boats, with officials warning people in some areas on Tuesday to stay away from their homes because of a risk of more strong quakes. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



People take shelter at an elementary school following an earthquake in Kanazawa, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Monday, Jan. 1, 2024. A series of major earthquakes started a fire and collapsed buildings on the west coast of Japan's main island, Honshu. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



People take shelter at a prefectural government office following an earthquake in Kanazawa, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Monday, Jan. 1, 2024. A series of major earthquakes started a fire and collapsed buildings on the west coast of Japan's main island, Honshu. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



Firefighters check around a collapsed house following an earthquake in Hakui, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. A series of powerful earthquakes hit western Japan, damaging buildings, vehicles and boats, with officials warning people in some areas on Tuesday to stay away from their homes because of a continuing risk of major quakes. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



Police make rescue operation at collapsed building following earthquake in Wajima, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. A series of powerful earthquakes hit western Japan, damaging buildings, vehicles and boats, with officials warning people in some areas on Tuesday to stay away from their homes because of a risk of more strong quakes. Credit: Kyodo News via AP



Houses fallen by an earthquake are seen in Kanazawa, Ishikawa prefecture, Japan Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. A series of powerful earthquakes in western Japan damaged homes, cars and boats, with officials warning people on Tuesday to stay away from their homes in some areas because of a continuing risk of major quakes and tsunamis. Credit: Kyodo News via AP

The region includes tourist spots famous for lacquerware and other traditional crafts, along with designated cultural heritage sites.

U.S. President Joe Biden said in a statement that his administration was "ready to provide any necessary assistance for the Japanese people."

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