

CHINA: EARTHQUAKE IN HEBEI PROVINCE

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The Disaster

A powerful earthquake struck Zhangjiankou Prefecture of northern Hebei Province just before noon local time (0350 GMT) on 10 January. The epicentre of the 6.2 Richter magnitude (5.8 on the body wave scale) quake was 33 kilometres (20 miles) below the earth's surface at 41.33N and 114.71E. The jolt was strongly felt in Beijing, approximately 200km (124 miles) to the southeast. This mountainous tableland in the northern half of the province, through which the Great Wall runs, is dotted with townships and villages making search and rescue efforts difficult due to problems with access. Relief efforts were hampered by bad winter weather overnight.

Hebei Province has a population of approximately 53 million people of which more than half live in the south where industry in the provincial capital of Shijiazhuang provides employment for the 1,000,000 residents. In the north, many of the villagers farm and raise livestock. Foodstocks now are no longer accessible in collapsed buildings and the toll on the livestock has yet to be determined.

Victims are now especially vulnerable to the extreme cold weather and frigid winds that blow down from the Mongolian steppes. Night temperatures of about *minus 14°* centigrade (6.8° F) made life even more difficult and dangerous for those without shelter and fearful of sleeping indoors during the many aftershocks. Search and rescue teams are continuing to dig through frozen rubble in search for victims. These efforts will take several days.

As in any significant earthquake, the statistics change constantly as more people are located in the rubble or accounted for in hospitals and temporary shelters. Zhangbei, Shangyi, Kangbao and Wanquan Counties all have casualties. Local newspapers in China report that in Zhangbei County 80% of the rooms in 76 villages of the 8 townships were destroyed.

Local and provincial government workers are co-ordinating rescue and shelter operations in the affected area. Several thousand military troops from a nearby base are assisting. The Zhangjiankou Municipal Government organised 12 medical teams. Quilts, tents, and heavy overcoats are being distributed. Schools and other public buildings deemed structurally safe are being used as shelters for the homeless. Structural engineers have begun the complex task of examining the integrity of the large city buildings, apartment blocks, infrastructure, and industry that were rattled by the earthquake.

Current estimates (as of 1400 GMT 10 January) provided by the Red Cross Society of China headquarters, Hebei Provincial Branch, local branches in the stricken area follow. These are changing constantly during this critical early time:

- { At least 49 dead
- { More than 8,000 injured, at least 1,000 seriously
- { Rooms damaged 104,000+
- { Rooms destroyed 10,000+
- { Rendered homeless 50,000+

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Local branches of the Red Cross Society of China quickly mobilised to aid the victims. Working together with local public health staff, Red Cross medical teams were deployed to the area to administer first aid, set up field hospitals, transport victims to hospitals, conduct triage, and help family members locate loved ones. Local Red Cross branches are also distributing their stocks of warm winter clothing and blankets, medicine, and assisting in decontamination of water supplies and disease control.

Senior staff from the Hebei Provincial Red Cross headquarters arrived in Beijing Sunday for briefings with RCSC Headquarters staff. Early Monday morning, Beijing time, an assessment team comprised of Provincial and RCSC Headquarters staff will travel to the disaster area.

The RCSC has an extensive nation-wide network of 156,000 grass-root units, 2,562 county and district branches, 347 prefecture and city branches, and 30 provincial branches.

Needs

A disaster of this magnitude depletes emergency stocks and emergency financial reserves. The local branches have distributed their stores of quilts and warm clothing, and now requiring funds for procurement. It is anticipated that more medical supplies will be required as the emergency phase continues.

Whether an appeal will be launched will be determined on Monday, meanwhile any funds contributed through the Federation will be utilised to support the local relief effort in procuring quilts and warm clothing, replenishing emergency stocks, and other needs as determined by the assessment team.

Related internet sites

USGS National Earthquake Information Service
www.civeng.carleton.ca/cgi-bin2/quakes

For links to other world-wide earthquake sites:
<http://geophys.washington.edu/seismosurfing.html>

China Daily newspaper
www.chinadaily.net

Government sites
www.asianet.com/china/china-gov

Red Cross Society of China homepage
www.chinatoday.com/org/rcsc/a.htm

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies homepage
www.ifrc.org

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