

SUSTAINABILITY

Lessons learnt from the Great Earthquake of 2011

When we do business as usual, it is difficult to realise the necessity of sustainability. Japan was not an exception. However, experiences of the great earthquake in 2011 and its subsequent disasters - tsunami and an extreme power shortage - made the people of Japan realise that sustainability is not a mere exercise just to look socially responsible, but it is by necessity a way of life as well as part of good business practice.

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Japan Convention Services, Inc. (JCS), was the first meeting management company in the world to be certified with BS8901, now known as ISO20121, the event sustainability certification, well known for certifying the London Olympics and COP15. JCS's journey to be an environmentally friendly company started when they managed COP10 as an appointed PCO in October 2010. This experience inspired the company to establish a department specialized in both CSR as well as event sustainability.

The training opportunity for employees is very important, as the concept of 'sustainability' is not easy to understand and, actually, not always welcomed by Local Organising Committees in Japan prior to 2011. When a PCO proposes something such as 'We can provide support to make your events environmentally friendly and sustainable, which is very important for your Society...' most of the responses were 'So what? What is the merit for us to be sustainable?'

All this changed when Japan was hit by the great earthquake in March 2011. Japan suffered the triple disasters: earthquake, tsunami, and a nuclear power plant catastrophic power failure. These disasters left Japan with, not only great damage in the coastal areas caused by the tsunami, but also with a temporary energy shortage due to the nuclear power plant shutdown. Many Japanese visited and worked as volunteers in the suffered area, and the experiences of facing such an emergency greatly raised people's awareness toward the environment, social responsibility and sustainability.

By practicing and improving sustainable measures on a daily basis, JCS gained a great capacity to manage events in unusual situations. The Cloud system enables employees to work from home without any delay even with electricity failures or paralyzed transportation. During an onsite operation, AED / first aid training and emergency protocol sections in staff manuals have become standard, and allow

the Organizing Committee members to be confident that all will be managed even if there were to be aftershocks.

Four months after the earthquake, ISTH2011 (International Society of Thrombosis and Haemostasis) was successfully held in Kyoto with more than 4,000 overseas participants visiting this small city. The conference had a visible and positive effect on tourism. Of course the meeting itself was managed in a sustainable way such as:

- distribution of plastic folders which will be reused repeatedly instead of vast amounts of paper
- each participant provided with Japanese paper fan to save power for air-conditioning
- use of FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certified paper for printed materials
- serving of whole fruits (eg apple) instead of snack bars, and
- filming of more than 160 video messages of delegates to encourage Japan.

Six months after the earthquake, more than 5,000 doctors gathered at Sendai, the area which suffered most, for their medical conference. Needless to say, the hosting of an event of this size greatly encouraged the people living in this area, and contributed a major economic impact.

THE JAPANESE MEETINGS INDUSTRY LEARNT A LESSON AFTER THE DRAMATIC EVENTS OF 2011, AND MADE THE PEOPLE OF JAPAN REALISE THAT SUSTAINABILITY IS A NECESSITY

The Japanese government acknowledged the importance of these events being held so shortly after the earthquake and gave letters of appreciation to the organisers of these two conferences in recognition of their hosting of these major events as well as for encouraging the Japanese people.

JCS goes the extra mile to play its role in Japan's recovery efforts. After the stoppages of all nuclear power plants, Japan is now forced to buy overpriced LNG

(Liquefied Natural Gas) from overseas. JCS worked with the government and the institute to set up the 'LNG Producer-Consumer Conference', the main topic of which was to discuss the fair price of LNG with stakeholders from around the world. The second 'LNG Producer-Consumer Conference' is now in the planning stages with many new proposals from the PCOs' point of view, to be even more environmentally sustainable.

We feel that the Japanese meetings industry learnt a lesson after the dramatic events of 2011, and made the people of Japan realise that sustainability is not a mere exercise, but it is by necessity a way of life as well as part of good business practice.

This article was provided by the International Association of Professional Congress Organisers, author Keiko Nishimoto, Group Manager, International Conference Management Group, Japan Convention Services Inc. (Keiko-n@convention.co.jp) IAPCO represents today 117 professional organisers, meeting planners and managers of international and national congresses, conventions and special events from 42 countries. info@iacpo.org / www.iapco.org



HOW TO STAY ENVIRONMENTALLY COMMITTED BY JCS

In order to stay environmentally committed, JCS put the following environmental measures in place to be exercised on a daily basis:

1. procurement task force to monitor vendors' environmental and sustainable commitment
2. provision of abstract applications for mobile devices to reduce printed materials
3. inclusion of emergency protocol section in all staff manuals
4. all employees to be trained for AED and first aid
5. introduction of cloud system that allows employees to work from home or indeed anywhere
6. company-owned vehicles switched to low-emission ones, and
7. operation of the company's own annual staff conference in an environmentally sustainable way, thus providing a training opportunity for employees whilst demonstrating the company's commitment to sustainability.