

KOBEnet: A VOLUNTARY INFORMATION NETWORK FOR EARTHQUAKE DISASTER MITIGATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Great Hanshin-Awaji (Hyogoken-Nanbu, Kobe) Earthquake on January 17, 1995, was really a shocking event to earthquake engineers in Japan as well as ordinary citizens. The earthquake engineering researchers of the Institute of Industrial Science (IIS), University of Tokyo were more or less involved in the aftermath of the earthquake in their academic societies or research projects. Extensive damage and a vast range of diverse activities taking place after the earthquake caused difficulties for earthquake engineering researchers in grasping correct and comprehensive aspects of the disaster. We asked ourselves 'What should we do now? What can we do now as researchers?' After a period of reflection on the extensive damage caused by the quake, we came to a conclusion that a human network to exchange information among researchers and to support various activities concerning restoration operations in affected areas was most needed.

On January 30, 1995, two weeks after the occurrence of the earthquake, the authors and their colleagues of IIS started a voluntary organization called iKOBEnet. The researchers of IIS related to earthquake engineering, including 6 Professors, 4 Associate Professors, 1 Lecture, 8 Research Associates, and 3 Secretaries, joined this human network (Yamazaki et al., 1995). The objectives of KOBEnet are as follows: 1) information exchange among nationwide research communities related to the Kobe Earthquake, 2) promotion and support of technical voluntary activities related to the disaster, and 3) international cooperation among researchers.

To perform these objectives, KOBEnet started to gather various kinds of information related to the disaster and opened an information room exhibiting the collected materials. This room has grown into a disaster information library and it is still open at IIS, four years after the earthquake. Newsletters (in Japanese) were also released many times and WWW homepage was created both in Japanese and in English. KOBEnet welcomed many foreign reconnaissance teams and gave brief-