



# NEWS RELEASE

## Defense Commissary Agency

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## Support ‘round the clock

Commissaries in Japan adjust hours,  
increase supplies in earthquake aftermath

*By Kevin L. Robinson,  
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**NOTE:** To see photographs of commissaries supporting the U.S. military in Japan in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami, visit <http://www.flickr.com/photos/commissary/sets/72157626274486563/>.

**FORT LEE, Va.** – Commissaries in Japan are partnering with U.S. installations there to provide whatever support possible in the aftermath of the March 11 earthquake, tsunami and other subsequent events affecting service members and their families.

The Defense Commissary Agency has 15 stores in Japan – 11 on the Japanese mainland and four on Okinawa. Within hours of the natural disaster, all of the stores opened and began working with their local military commander to adjust operating hours as needed and meet the needs of the military community.

“As long as our military members and their families are in Japan, we will be there, too, to provide the commissary benefit,” said DeCA Director and CEO Joseph H. Jeu. “We will do everything in our power to ensure that products are safe and available for our customers.”

As the dangers wrought by the earthquake and tsunami subsided, concerns turned to food safety with reports of significant damage to the reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in northeastern Japan. The Food Protection, Japan District Veterinary Command

immediately began a radiation surveillance program to screen food storage areas in Japan, including commissaries.

To ensure its products are free from harmful radiation, commissaries have removed from their shelves all food products from affected areas.

Throughout the crisis in Japan, DeCA is staying focused on keeping its shelves stocked with the critical items service members and their families need, said DeCA West Director Keith Hagenbuch. “The enormous task of maintaining the product flow to the Pacific Theater, specifically Japan, couldn’t be done without our industry suppliers and vendors, and the outstanding work of our commissary employees.”

Before the earthquake, DeCA’s three central distribution centers in Japan were fully stocked. Since March 11, these centers have been pivotal in a cycle of deliveries from suppliers in the United States to the ports in Japan to the distribution centers to the commissaries. The deliveries respond to commissary orders for additional quantities of items such as water, rice, canned goods, charcoal, toilet paper, batteries and other essential products.

As product continues to flow to Japan’s mainland stores, so do tales of the impact of commissaries on the strained health and welfare of service members and their families. These stores also support the added troops brought to Japan as part of the U.S. military relief effort, codenamed Operation Tomodachi – Japanese for “friendship.” The following represent just a few examples of commissaries going beyond their normal mission:

- At Naval Air Facility Atsugi, the commissary opened after the earthquake on a day it is normally closed;
- At Sagami Depot, the commissary supported a 70-percent surge in sales to accommodate the community’s response to the crisis;
- The Iwakuni Central Distribution Center worked with commissaries at Hario and Sasebo to provide supplies to U.S. ships supporting the relief effort;
- The Okinawa Central Distribution Center processed nearly 4,400 cases of bottled water to support Marines deploying to Japan; and
- At Yokota Air Base, the commissary processed a special purchase of baby formula and baby food that was taken to evacuation centers in Sendai, an area hard-hit by the earthquake and tsunami.

At Misawa Air Base, DeCA’s northernmost commissary in Japan, the earthquake knocked out power for two days. For almost two weeks after the quake and tsunami hit, the base struggled to operate on either no or partial electricity and generator power. The initial earthquake

and subsequent aftershocks had been so violent that most of the store's shelves were empty: A majority of the products had been tossed on the floor.

Immediately after the earthquake, Greg McGruder, the store director, led a team of employees to sift through the damage, clean up and open for emergency purchases. Later that evening, as anxious customers waited outside, he and a diverse team of store employees served as cashiers and retrieved water, flashlights and other essentials.

In the following days, commissary customers ventured to the commissary for necessities, often lining up for an hour before the store opened. But for some, like Amy Grant, a [Department of Defense Education Activity] teacher who led a group of teachers and customers to the store, they were there to help their commissary recover.

"I opened the store and the crowd just started clapping and cheering," said McGruder, who credited his store staff, vendor support and his zone and regional leadership for helping to keep the store open. "Many customers stopped to say thank you or to volunteer to help us get the store back in order."

Air Force Col. Al Wimmer, vice commander of the base's 35th Fighter Wing, whose own wife, Kelli, was one of the commissary volunteers, thanked the commissary for helping to "restore confidence and ease" to the community.

"Amid rumors of food shortages ... customers rushed [to] the commissary and lines were horrendous," Wimmer said in an e-mail message to Jeu on March 22. "Mr. McGruder and his staff ensured that nothing but courtesy and service were exhibited by every employee. ... I know because I personally watched his efforts on several occasions.

"While the Japanese communities around Misawa Air Base suffered from shortages and distribution problems... I was able to confidently broadcast – via live radio, websites, etc. – that we [at Misawa Air Base] had no issues with food supplies. It made all the difference in the world to our base population that they did not have to worry."

**-DeCA-**

**About DeCA:** *The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. Shoppers save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices – savings amounting to thousands of dollars annually. For current savings figures for various groups – single member up to a family of seven – visit <http://www.commissaries.com>. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America's military and their*

*families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.*