

Press Release

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Floods in Japan CNES activates Pleiades satellites to aid relief efforts

Since 6 July, flooding and landslides after severe rainstorms in west and south-west Japan have claimed close to 200 lives in the space of three days, left a trail of destruction across large tracts of the country and led to the evacuation of some four million people in the worst weather-related disaster to hit the archipelago since 1982.

The International Charter on Space and Major Disasters was activated on 7 July by the liaison unit at the crisis management centre of the Japanese Prime Minister's office. Thanks to their responsiveness and agility, CNES's Pleiades satellites were the first to acquire imagery of the disaster area less than 18 hours after the activation. Twenty optical and radar satellites working for the Charter were also pressed into action, revealing major flooding. SERTIT, the French regional image processing and remote sensing department, rapidly generated three maps from Pleiades imagery at CNES's request to identify flooded areas, landslides and roads that have been cut off. These maps were then sent on to the Japanese government to help organize emergency response and relief efforts.

The International Charter on Space and Major Disasters brings its space technologies to the aid of emergency responders in the field in the event of major disasters. Founded in the wake of the UNISPACE III conference in Vienna in 1999, it delivers satellite imagery rapidly and free of charge from its participating members to nations affected by large-scale natural or human-induced disasters. CNES and ESA are among the founding members of the charter, which today counts 15 member space agencies. The charter's aims are to respond quickly to requests from crisis management units in affected countries by tasking satellites to image disaster areas and aid populations and relief teams. It offers its users 24/7 access all year round.

This activation is the 577th since the charter's inception in 2000 and the 16th since the start of this year. CNES will be taking over the rotating chair of the charter for six months starting in October.

CONTACTS

Pascale Bresson

Press Officer

Tel: +33 (0)1 44 76 75 39

pascale.bresson@cnes.fr

Raphaël Sart

Press Officer

Tel: +33 (0)1 44 76 74 51

raphael.sart@cnes.fr

Sébastien Martignac

Press Officer

Tel: +33 (0)1 44 76 78 35

sebastien.martignac@cnes.fr

presse.cnes.fr