TOKYO — Hundreds of police and coast guard officers were Tuesday searching for the remains of around 2,800 people still missing 18 months to the day after a massive earthquake and tsunami hit Japan.

About 800 officers scouted beaches and rocks or probed waters with boats and underwater robots along the rugged Pacific coast in the Tohoku region, according to media reports.

The disaster, on March 11 last year, left 18,684 people dead or missing and sparked reactor meltdowns at the Fukushima nuclear power plant on the coast, figures from the National Police Agency (NPA) showed.

Of those, 2,814 people remain unaccounted for. Of the missing people, Miyagi has the most at 1,394, followed by Iwate with 1,205 and 211 in Fukushima.

In addition, 1,632 people have died of disaster-related causes, such as fatigue and bad health from living in evacuation shelters in Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima, Kyodo news agency said.

Some 343,000 people are still living in about 136,000 temporary homes, such as makeshift houses and private properties rented by the government.

Nearly half—161,000 people—remain unable to return to their homes in Fukushima amid fears of radiation from the stricken power plant, the district’s administration said Tuesday.

In the city of Kesennuma, about 10 officers searched a fishing port where a set of skeletal remains was recovered last month, according to local media.

“We will strenuously continue the search in order to help return remains to families as soon as possible,” Kesennuma police director Rinji Ono told public broadcaster NHK.

NPA officials said they are also trying to identify 221 unclaimed bodies through DNA matches and facial sketches. A spokesman said such techniques had helped the NPA identify 252 bodies over the past six months.

Initially, police relied on physical features and personal belongings to identify the remains of disaster victims, but as time passes, DNA has become the preferred method, the NPA spokesman said.

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9 Comments (LEAVE A COMMENT)

iceshoecream SEP. 12, 2012 - 07:44AM JST

No offense to the families and people affected by the massive tsunami but at this point the search is pretty much pointless.

yasukuni SEP. 12, 2012 - 07:48AM JST

You're right, but many Japanese would do anything to find remains.
18 months after March 11 disaster › Japan Today: Japan News and Discussion

SimonDB SEP. 12, 2012 - 07:49AM JST
Without trying to be ghoulish what would you be looking for after 18 months? Particularly if the body had been in the sea. Would there be anything but the bones remaining? Any experts out there know the answer?

zichi SEP. 12, 2012 - 08:25AM JST
The reconstruction of Tohoku is too slow and at this rate will take more than 20 years.

Lucabra SEP. 12, 2012 - 08:56AM JST
They should be concentrating more on those living in the shelters, especially if they're dying due to the conditions there.

Probie SEP. 12, 2012 - 09:40AM JST
No offense to the families and people affected by the massive tsunami but at this point the search is pretty much pointless.

You've obviously never lost anyone in a disaster or accident. Having at least something to bury or cremate means a lot.

Kawt SEP. 12, 2012 - 10:04AM JST
Disaster area are now cleaned up but people can't go back and build houses at same places. New residence area are hardly found at higher elevation and there are not many enough flat places for new town. Many victims give up hometown and leave for another places to find new jobs. Elderly people don't get out and rather like to stay there. This is today's Tohoku. Reconstruction is a long way.

Alladin SEP. 12, 2012 - 10:36AM JST
Not to be mean, but there is no way that these people will ever be found. If they are alive today, they would have shown up a very long time ago. If they can't be found, they are either alive and in hiding or dead as a dried up log floating on the ocean. I pray that the families of these people can soon come to the reality that their will never be found and that they can become comforted in other ways other than hoping for something that will never arrive.

Some 343,000 people are still living in about 136,000 temporary homes, such as makeshift houses and private properties rented by the government. Nearly half -- 161,000 people -- remain unable to return to their homes in Fukushima amid fears of radiation from the stricken power plant, the district's administration said Tuesday.

Let me get this straight -- there are over 300,000 people who are still displaced, which surely costs money every day to keep them in these temporary homes, and...


...they want to spend a fortune on a damn tree?! Glad that article has been removed; here's to hoping the whole project is being removed, too!