Kobe earthquake, Japan (17 January 1995)

MR Touch Natural hazards – Event report

Geo Risks Research, NatCatSERVICE

One of the greatest urban earthquake catastrophes for the economy as a whole occurred one year to the day after the Northridge earthquake in the United States.

Event report
The earthquake of 17 January 1995 was the worst natural catastrophe to hit Japan since the Kanto earthquake in 1923. The epicentre was off the coast of Japan, between the northern tip of the island of Awaji and the city of Kobe. The quake reached a magnitude of 7.2. It lasted no more than 15 seconds. The hypocentral depth was about 13 km.

Losses
The earthquake catastrophe of Kobe caused overall losses of US$ 100bn and brought the metropolis to an almost complete standstill in the first days and weeks of 1995. It continued the series of earthquake catastrophes that hit major cities last century like San Francisco in 1906, Tokyo in 1923, and Tangshan in 1976.

Summary of losses in Japan
Hundreds of thousands of homes destroyed or very badly damaged. The city of Kyoto hit, especially temple precincts. Losses costing billions at the port facilities in Kobe. Oil, steel, electronics, and automobile industries severely affected. Highways, roads, bridges, railway facilities between Kyoto and Kobe destroyed, many trains derailed. Infrastructure collapsed, gas and water supply interrupted. Power and telecommunication lines cut, power outages. Industrial production hit hard. Tens of thousands injured, one hundred thousand homeless, one million people affected.