The Enshu coast is located on the southern side of Honshu Island (Japan) (Fig. 1) (Chanson and Aoki 2004). The western part of the coast, so-called Omotehama, spans from Irago Cape to the mouth of the Tenryu River. The shoreline has been subjected to significant erosion, at a rate close to 1 m per year for past centuries. In recent years, some coastal protection works were built to slow the erosion rate. At the same time, the natural supplies of sediment materials at the Temyu River mouth has drastically diminished because of dam construction along the Tenryu River and their reservoir sedimentation (Shinjo and Fujita 2004). The coastline has also had a history of rapid changes in shoreline. For example, a bifurcation of the Kuroshio current off the Enshu coast caused unusually high sea levels from mid September to late November 1999 that led to a serious shoreline retreat at Terasawa and Kojima of up to 20 m (Aoki 2002).

Japan is a densely populated country located at the juncture of three tectonic plates. The Enshu coast has been adversely affected by severe tsunamis. For example, the mouth of the Hamanako Lake was drastically altered by a tsunami in AD 1498 (magnitude of 8.6 on the Richter scale). The estuary mouth shifted by about 3.5 km and the previously freshwater lake became a saltwater system. The Japanese community is well-educated about earthquakes and associated natural hazards, including tsunamis. Along the Japanese shorelines, the tsunami warning signs are reminders of the natural hazards together with a network of warning sirens, typically at the top of the cliff of surroundings hills (Fig. 2B & 2D).

Figure 2 presents a variety of tsunami warning signs along the Enshu coast. The diversity of the warning signs is interesting. All signs have explicative graphics and a number have warning texts in Japanese, English, and Portuguese, because there is a relatively large Brazilian community in the nearby Aichi Prefecture.

Figures 3 and 4 show further a number of unusual road signs along the main road >42< between Hamamatsu city and Irago Cape, running parallel to the Enshu coastline. Figure 3 highlighted a famous surfing place (Pacific Long Beach). Figure 4 was located in front of a coffee shop, just behind a tsunami warning sign!

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Figure 2. Photographs of the tsunami warning signs. (A) Tsunami sign along the road in Takatoyo township on 14 March 1999 (left) and the same sign on 7 November 2008 (below left). (B) Newer tsunami warning sign at Ikobe beach below Takatoyo township on 7 November 2008. (C) Tsunami warning sign next to the access road to Higashi Akazawa on 22 November 2008. (D) Tsunami warning sign at a small fishing harbor between Higashikanbe and Mutsure on 23 November 2008.
Figure 2 (above). (E) Tsunami warning sign at the Tenryu River mouth on 27 November 2008. (F) Tsunami warning sign at the Magome River mouth (left bank) on 27 November 2008.

Figure 3. Road sign above the road <42> on 29 November 2008; general view and detail (below).

Figure 4. Coffee shop sign post along the road <42> at the boundary between Tahara City and Toyohashi City, and at the turnoff to Shiroshita, on 23 November 2008. Just behind there was an old tsunami warning sign at the start of the road to Shiroshita beach.