

Chapter 9

Measures toward Minamata's Regeneration

Building a Model Environmental City (International Environmental City)

On June 25, 1992, Minamata City Council passed "The Declaration on a City that values the Environment, Health, and Welfare". The Declaration lays down town-planning guidelines that bring the lessons of Minamata disease to life.

On November 14, 1992, Minamata City issued a declaration on the "Construction of a Model City for the Environment". The declaration is based on the understanding that Minamata's experience of serious industrial pollution should serve as a warning to all mankind, and on the firm resolution that a tragedy like of Minamata Disease must never be allowed to occur again. It serves as a point of reference for citizens' behavior, and establishes guidelines for future town-planning and city development.

Based on these precepts, in January 1996, Minamata City approved the 3rd Minamata City General Plan. The plan describes a future vision of the city as an "Industrial-Cultural City" that values the environment, health and welfare. The Fundamental Environment Plan, approved (by council) in March laid out a clear framework for planning and developing the model environmental city, and marked a big step toward the regeneration of Minamata.

The administration and citizens of Minamata City are currently working together to tackle a range of projects that promote the development of Minamata as a Model City for the Environment.

● Sorting, Recycling and Reduction Waste

To facilitate waste reduction and recycling in Minamata, the sorting and collection of household waste began in August 1993. Since the 2005 fiscal year, all household waste is separated into 22 categories and the reuse and recycling of waste material has been strongly promoted.

Waste reduction and recycling programs aimed at realizing a zero emission (zero waste) society will be further expanded in the future.



Local Residents undertake the Sorting of Waste Materials

● Support for the Conclusion of District Environmental Agreements

Minamata City government has endorsed the drawing up of District Environmental Agreements. Designed to preserve residents' immediate environs, their so-called "living environment", the district agreements are developed by local residents and establish environmental "lifestyle rules" for each district. As at the end of the 1999-fiscal year, six districts have concluded District Environmental Agreements.

● Eco-Shop Authorization

Local shops employing environmentally friendly policies, such as energy saving and waste reduction, receive Eco-shop certification. The Eco-Shop system started in 1999 and, up until the end of the 1999 fiscal year, 13 shops received certification.

● Whole Village Lifestyle Museum

Four districts (Kagumeishi, Okawa, Kugino and Koshikoba) have been designated as 'Whole Village Lifestyle Museums', where the community itself has become a museum of life. The districts have 'Lifestyle Curators', who provide guidance on life in the area, and 'Life Craftsmen', who create things. As of July 2007 there were 40 Lifestyle Curators and 61 Life Craftsmen.

● City Office Awarded ISO 14001 Certification

On February 23, 1999, following employment of environmental protection and improvement policies in all its business activities and services, Minamata City Office gained ISO 14001 Certification. ISO 14001 defines an international standard for the continued implementation and maintenance of environmental management systems. Minamata City was the first local government in Kumamoto Prefecture, and the fifth in Japan, to earn this certification. At the time Minamata City Office was a pioneer in receiving ISO certification, and results have included improvement of the region's image and growth of the Model Environment City concept; significant cost reductions; and improved environmental awareness of City employees. In September 2003, upon these activities, Minamata City made a self-declaration to be audited by the citizens of Minamata.

● Launch of the Family-ISO and School-ISO Systems

Following on from the acquisition of ISO 14001 recognition, households and schools undertaking environmentally aware activities based on the ISO 14001 methodology are awarded certificates by the mayor. More than 80 households and all the elementary and junior high schools in the city (16 schools in total) have been recognized for their environmentally aware activities.

● Fostering Ecosystems

Programs to foster and maintain ecosystems (wildlife habitat areas) were introduced in the 1998 fiscal year. The programs aim to protect the natural environment and promote people's coexistence with nature.

● Creating Regional Symbiotic Environment Models

First introduced in the 1999 fiscal year, the Regional Symbiotic Environment Model system encourages Minamata residents to promote the symbiosis of humans and nature in local districts. The City advertises for model districts, selects suitable candidates and subsidizes part of the cost of any projects and activities undertaken by model districts.

● Recognizing Environmental Masters

Local producers and craftspeople employing and promoting environmentally-friendly and environmental health-conscious production processes, including the use of organic manure or natural materials, are recognized as "Environmental Masters". The Environmental Master system began in the 1998 fiscal year, and as at October 2007 28 people have been authorized, including Japanese paper craftsmen, tea farmers and rice producers.

● Coalition of Local Governments for Environmental Initiatives Conference

The "8th Coalition of Local Governments for Environmental Initiatives Conference" (organized by the Coalition of Local Governments for Environment Initiatives Conference Committee, and Minamata City), was held in Minamata City from May 24-26, 2000. Approximately 1000 people attended the conference, representing 50 local governments and some 70 citizens' groups concerned with environmental issues.

Organized around a central theme of "A Message for the 21st Century", the conference featured 21 sessions held at 6 different venues. Conference sessions covered topics such as "city planning with residents' participation and collaboration", "environmentally conscious local government systems-ISO", and "promoting waste reduction, classification and recycling". Environmental town-planning was also discussed.

● The 6th International Conference on Mercury as a Global Pollutant

The 6th International Conference on Mercury as a Global Pollutant which brought together leading mercury researchers from around the world was held at the Minamata Cultural Hall and the Minamata General Moyainaoshi Center 'Moyai Center' from October 15 to 19, 2001. 412 people from 39 countries participated in the conference and 535 reports on the 5 categories such as health and air were demonstrated.

Minamata disease patients talked about their experiences with watery eyes and the mayor of Minamata City manifested the resolution on the "Challenge to an Environmental Model City".

Various volunteers including interpreters supported the conference and the cultural exchange deepened between the participants and the citizens.

● The World "Lead-Off City" Conference

'Working to build an Environmental Capital City' was the theme for the 14th World "Lead-Off City" Conference (hosted by Minamata City, Kumamoto Prefecture and the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport) held on February 10 and 11, 2007. Some 900 local government representatives and residents attended the conference, which was held at the Minamata Cultural Hall.

After the keynote speech, seminars were held on four subjects: 'Environmentally Friendly Industry', 'Reducing Waste for Environmental Lifestyle Development', 'Thinking about the Environment of Food' and 'Environmentally-themed Exchange'. Participants from five overseas cities, five Japanese cities and eight private organizations exchanged ideas and experiences of working towards creating a sustainable society.



The Minamata Environmental Creation Development Project

Managed in collaboration with Kumamoto Prefecture, the Minamata Environmental Creation Development Project was started in the 1990 fiscal year. The project sets down plans for the improvement and active use of the Minamata Bay Reclaimed Land, and for promoting regional development (constructing a model environmental city of love and comfort), in cooperation with citizens. The Minamata Environmental Creation Development Project has tackled various projects, including hosting numerous international conferences, public meetings (seminars), and the Tokyo-Minamata Exhibition. These projects build understanding of (the problems of) Minamata disease, facilitate interaction among citizens and are helping to shift the public's image of Minamata from a dark, distorted one, to one that promotes the regeneration of Minamata. This has accelerated the process of Moyainaoshi (the re-establishment of emotional ties, or reconciliation), such that citizens are now able to speak up in public about Minamata disease issues, something that was impossible in the past. And local government, disease patients and citizens are now able to work together to host various events. Although the project drew to a close in the 1998 fiscal year, its completion marked a huge step forward toward the regeneration of Minamata.

Following on from the Environmental Creation Project, is the Minamata Symbiosis Promotion Project, which began in the 1999 fiscal year, and a range of other measures to promote understanding of Minamata disease (issues).



Evening Discussion Forum - Youth on Minamata disease and the future of Minamata (June,1994)

Construction of the "Moyainaoshi" Community Centers

Subsidized by the national government as part of the final plan for the settlement of Minamata disease, the construction of 2 community centers, the "Minamata General Moyainaoshi Center - Moyai Center" and the "Minamata Southern Moyainaoshi Center - Orange Center" were completed from 1996 to 1998. The facilities are utilized as places for interaction among citizens and as bases for the provision of social welfare services.



Minamata General Moyainaoshi Center, "Moyai Center"



Minamata Southern Moyainaoshi Center, "Orange Center"