

NO MORE MINAMATA DISEASE



**Mercury destroyed
our environment and
deprived us of our human
rights**

Koichiro Matsunaga

Minamata Disease Patient

Four years before my birth, both the Japanese government and the factory, Chisso, knew that the cause of Minamata Disease was drainage from the factory. However, they did not stop it: economic development was prioritized over human life. I am so frustrated whenever I think that I might not have received such incurable damage, if only they had stopped it before I was born. I've been in a wheelchair for about ten years because of the pain in my legs. Mercury destroyed our environment and deprived us of our human rights. It forced me to suffer all my life. Minamata disease is not over yet. Problems have not been solved yet.

I do not want to see any more children suffer like us. Please take appropriate control of mercury for future children. I need the whole world to avoid causing any more tragedy by mercury.

580,000 m²

"LANDFILL" containing mercury in Minamata Bay

This reclaimed land has to be surveyed **FOREVER**

This area shows how much we lost because of mercury pollution in Minamata. The bay, once called "sacred place for fish", was reclaimed with contaminated sediments dredged from the bottom, then became a park called "Eco Park". The construction project cost a huge amount of money and time. No matter how much money was spent, however, we could not restore what had been destroyed, such as the rich sea where people used to fish, the tidal flat where people used to catch shellfish and crab, and the beautiful life embedded with the environment.

The area imposes an obligation of everlasting maintenance and monitoring the environment on people, including later generations. Minamata bay shows that the remediation of contaminated sites is not enough for a final goal. How can we keep it safe forever?

Learn lessons of **FAILURE** of Minamata Disease

In the Minamata case, the government and the factory failed to take prompt action to prevent the damage and minimize the expansion of mercury pollution, even after they knew the cause of the disease was effluent from the factory. The damage, such as the polluted area and the number of victims, could have been much smaller only if they stopped the drainage when they could have done so.

Please adopt the guidance of contaminated sites for those sites needed the treatment. Otherwise, long and slow negotiation among stakeholders can delay treatment of the sites. Please do not leave the sites contaminated, and do not let pollution expand like it did in Minamata. Please do not prioritize the economy over the human lives like they did in Minamata.



Minamata Bay Reclaimed Land

- Reclaimed area : 580,000m² (same size as Aliana Park in Geneva)
- Project period : 14 years (1977- 1990)
- Project cost : 48,500,000,000 yen (aprox.446 mil USD)
- Treated soil amount: 1,510,000m³
- Dredging area: 1,510,000m²

Sediment whose mercury concentration was over 25ppm was dredged and reclaimed in Minamata Bay. The reclaimed mercury sediments might trigger further pollution because of deterioration of the retaining wall or earthquakes. This is one of many landfills related to Chisso. There are sites which have not been treated and controlled by either the government or Chisso.

Set regulations and thresholds to protect **LIFE** and **HEALTH**

Mercury damaged the health of many people and destroyed their life. We know and live with these people in Minamata. Therefore, we sincerely wish to see no more people suffer from mercury like our loved one, friends and neighbors. What we want is not a complete elimination of risks because that is impossible, but a thorough discussion and careful process to decide thresholds strict enough to protect humans and the environment, without making loopholes and protecting business profits.

..... What is Minamata Disease ?

Minamata Disease was caused by methylmercury in drainage from the acetaldehyde production process of 'Chisso' factory in Minamata. Methylmercury contaminated fish and shellfish, and through the food chain, the brains of those who ate them without knowing the contamination were affected. Many children, including Mr. Matsunaga, were born with symptoms like cerebral palsy because methylmercury easily transfers to the fetus through the mother's placenta.

Minamata Disease was officially reported in May 1956, in Minamata, Kumamoto Pref., Japan. By 1959, Kumamoto University and the governments became aware of the cause of Minamata disease was organic mercury discharged from Chisso. Then Chisso themselves discovered the cause with experiments using cats. The results were suppressed by Chisso, and they continued to discharge the toxic waste until 1968.

..... How many people suffer from Minamata Disease?

2,283 have been officially certified as Minamata disease patients including Mr. Matsunaga. In addition, about 70,000 are officially admitted as affected by mercury and suffer from various symptoms such as sensory disturbance in the limbs and ataxia. Applications for the certification and legal trials continue to expose the extent of the damage even today. Yet, a total number of sufferers is still unknown due to the lack of comprehensive health investigation in the affected area. Many people have not even mentioned their symptoms from fear of stigmatization, or have died before recognized by the government.

Profile

KOICHIRO MATSUNAGA 松永幸一郎

Fetal Minamata disease patient. Born in 1963. He could not walk until 7 years old due to Minamata disease. Despite of disabilities, he enjoyed riding bicycles and shogi, Japanese chess. In 2010, it became difficult for him to walk because of a pain which forced him to live in a wheelchair. Today, he tells his story to people including children.

He enjoys Japanese Chess



MESSAGE from SHINOBU SAKAMOTO

Please take appropriate action. I want you to know the reality of Minamata disease. Many people are still suffering and struggling from pollution, and some are not yet recognized as victims. I must repeat my message until pollution ends: Minamata disease is not over. We must protect woman and unborn children from toxic pollution. We must work together.

SHINOBU SAKAMOTO is a fetal Minamata disease patient, born in 1956. Shinobu traveled to Stockholm with her mother, Fujie, and other supporters where the initial UN Conference on the Human Environment was held in 1972. She attended COP1 of the Minamata Convention on mercury.



Short video about
Shinobu Sakamoto
(COP1)

MICO NET is a citizens' network that aims to support active implementation of the Minamata Convention on mercury and to promote lessons of Minamata disease from Minamata.

