

Toyama Prefecture's Promotion of Environmental Cooperation

Koichi Murakami

Toyama Prefecture is mid-way along the Sea of Japan (the East Sea) coastline and is rich in natural beauty. Among its geographical advantages are scheduled flights between Toyama and countries on the opposite shores of the Sea of Japan. Toyama has experience in coping with pollution problems, such as itai-itai disease and therefore has expertise in environmental pollution. Its Northwest Pacific Region Environmental Cooperation Center (NPEC) was established in September 1998. NPEC is fully financed by Toyama Prefecture and is under the jurisdiction of the Environment Agency as a public service corporation.

The objective of NPEC is to help to ensure that both the present and future generations will have a rich marine environment to enjoy. NPEC carries out various activities, such as exchanges and research in environmental preservation, and it provides support for environmental policies. In April 1999, NPEC was designated a Regional Activity Center of the Northwest Pacific Action Plan, which is promoted by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Toyama Prefecture has therefore been playing an important role as a center for environmental protection in the Northwest Pacific region.

Toyama Prefecture has advantages in environmental work. By cooperating with countries on the opposite side of the Sea of Japan in this field, we want not only to contribute to the well-being of these countries but also to create a base for regional development, where people, goods, and information can gather together. Such a base will accelerate research and technological development, stimulate more activities, and lead to further regional economic development.

Global environmental problems have become some of the most important issues in common among the people of the world. To solve these problems, we need comprehensive approaches with a global partnership that surmount differences in regimes and systems among countries. Japan, China, the Koreas, and Russia especially exert strong environmental influences on each other, because of their geographical proximity. Serious impacts on the environment are now common in these four countries, because of industrialization and concentrations of population. Therefore, we must cooperate to protect the environment for the next generations.

Environmental issues include a combination of geography, climate, politics, economics, and life-style in a region. It may not be easy to establish a system for environmental cooperation. But we will make every effort for progress in this area, taking into consideration the situations and needs of each country and using our experience and technology.