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Think Globally, Act Locally



Yoshikazu Suzuki, President and CEO of Kimitsu System, Inc., embarked on a career dedicated to environmental protection after witnessing the transformation of his hometown, Kimitsu, into a heavy industrial site during Japan's post-war period. Today, the company is dedicated to eradicating geological pollution and promoting environmental protection efforts in Japan and abroad.

I have been interested in what's below the surface—most prominently, the issue of land being contaminated by harmful substances. I was born in 1951 and spent my adolescence at the height of Japan's economic boom. But despite this growth, it was also a time of pollution.

As pollution began to undermine human health, the country recognized the severity of the issue and decided to confront it. In 1970, during what was known as the Pollution Session of the Diet, the government established several anti-pollution laws and created the governmental Ministry of the Environment.

At the time, the government focused on air and water pollution and was lacking in its awareness of land pollution. This was a common problem both in Japan and around the world. The government first examined atmospheric issues, followed by water quality, and finally, issues on the ground. Pollution is often addressed in this order of priority because while we can always buy alternative sources of water, we cannot choose the air we breathe.

When Japan began addressing its pollution problems, the Sumida River, which flows through Tokyo, was jet-black; you could smell the stench from the inside of a train with

the windows open. Pollution control measures worked well, significantly improving Japan's air and water quality.

Advocating for sustainable waste management



After graduating from university, I read in a newsletter that the Kimitsu City Hall would launch Japan's first remote air pollution monitoring system. At the same time, my hometown of Kimitsu in Chiba Prefecture was being transformed into a heavy industrial site, attracting one of the world's largest industrial steel complexes at the time.

Learning of this, I started my career by hastily taking the civil service examination, believing my Master's degree in electrical engineering would prepare me for the position. While working as an engineer in public service for 31 years, I visited sites in Japan and overseas to conduct research. During this time, I also created the academic framework for environmental geology.

In my view, land pollution mirrors human illnesses: just as humans contract infectious diseases by being exposed to pathogens, the Earth absorbs contaminants from air and water. During my research, my teams learned about the mechanisms connecting the Earth with harmful substances, developed countermeasures against them and cured the root causes.

Taking Covid-19 as an example, the pandemic was triggered by a new viral strain. Similarly, new environmental problems are triggered by the invasion of new pathogens or toxic substances. This mechanism has always been subject to ground characteristics as geological conditions determine how much of a toxic substance can be absorbed.

Japan is a volcanic country, with vast stretches of land covered in volcanic ash. This ash is thickly covered with a layer of excellent soil that has been exposed to rain, wind and life for more than 10,000 years. Even acid rain is neutralized by the soil, meaning acid rain doesn't pose a problem in Japan as it does in Europe.

However, this could be why we aren't thoughtful and considerate enough toward the Earth, which is why I believe in the importance of raising awareness.

A call for concerted global effort

Within land pollution, I am currently focusing on the issue of disposal sites for waste materials, which are usually considered urban facilities. For around 30 years, I have

suggested that Japan needs to construct a more inviting type of industrial waste disposal site. Building such a site would increase employment opportunities, just as it would if we attracted commercial facilities or industrial complexes. However, unlike commercial institutions, an industrial waste disposal site would be frowned upon by locals.



Why is that? It's because industrial waste disposal sites are commonly perceived as local nuisances.

Due to this shared notion and the nature of vested interests, people tend to believe these facilities should be contained in mountainous areas. However, industrial waste disposal sites are necessary urban facilities to maintain our current lifestyles and for future growth and development. I hope to solve this issue in my lifetime.

We only have one planet, and we have no choice but to live here. Because of the concepts of territories and nations, there are contentions on who will take up the initiative to clean up our planet. The only way to advance initiatives on a global scale is to start from where you are. If people from every country could think globally and act locally, I believe it would surely lead to a better future for us all.

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