

Message from the Minister of the Environment

Dear Reader,

Four years and three months have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake, which caused enormous, widespread damage primarily along the Pacific coast in the Tohoku region. Japan has worked to recover and rebuild in the belief that there can be no real new era of Japan without the reconstruction of Fukushima and the Tohoku region. We have focused our efforts on issues including decontamination, treatment of designated waste and disaster waste, and establishment of interim storage facilities for contaminated waste. Each one of these endeavors has enabled us to lift evacuation orders in some regions. Regarding the construction of interim storage facilities, a number of local municipalities made the courageous decision to accept shipments to these facilities, with the agreement that the utmost care must be taken in building them and in transporting the waste. We continue to work with landowners by taking into account landowners' concerns and with thorough explanations about what is being conducted. Disposal of designated waste also requires taking a straightforward, honest approach with the regions involved, and close coordination is needed as efforts proceed. Going forward, we continue to bear in mind that many people are still living as evacuees and approach the issues from the standpoint of the people in the affected regions, working closely with them in committed efforts to ensure the reconstruction of their communities.



Turning to achieving a sustainable society, the importance of addressing environmental issues goes without saying, including effective measures to mitigate global warming, the preservation of biodiversity, and efforts to reduce waste. In addition, Japan is facing a steep decline in the birth rate and a rapidly aging society, along with an excessive concentration of the population in the Tokyo metropolitan area. The question of how to create independent, sustainable communities by making full use of local characteristics in all places from the smallest villages to the largest cities has thus become our fundamental concern. In September 2014, the government took a step toward addressing the issue by establishing the Headquarter for Overcoming Population Decline and Vitalizing Local Economy in Japan. Unified government efforts are now underway based on the Act on Overcoming Population Decline and Vitalizing Local Economy enacted in November of that year.

Given these circumstances, we have selected “Working with the Environment to Build Local Communities and Economies” as the theme for this year’s Annual Report on the Environment, the Sound Material-Cycle Society, and Biodiversity. The report attempts to clarify how efforts to solve environmental issues can also lead to resolving difficulties faced by local communities and economies, namely by describing the regional reconstruction efforts in areas affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake, which are based on environmental policy to restore the environment. The report also discusses environmental measures being implemented in Japan and how they contribute to the revitalization of regional economies and disaster preparedness. It provides specific examples of rebuilding communities by fully using natural and other local resources as well as regional characteristics with a focus on efforts by individuals, who are willing to play a leading role toward achieving a sustainable society.

It is my sincere hope that this report will prompt further efforts to overcome our environmental problems, encourage regional revitalization, and lead to the creation of sustainable communities.

Best regards,
Yoshio Mochiduki
Minister of the Environment