

Salutations from Supporter

Masaru Hashimoto

Governor, Ibaraki Prefectural Government

As you just heard, I am Masaru Hashimoto, Governor of Ibaraki Prefectural Government. I am ecstatic that the fourth International Symposium on Environmental Endocrine Disrupters is being held in grand style in the city of Tsukuba in Ibaraki Prefecture. I would first like to express my deep appreciation to Minister Kawaguchi, Dr. Suzuki, chairman of the Japan Society of Endocrine Disrupter Research, and everybody else involved for making this event possible. I would also like to thank everybody from the prefecture and the outside of it, from Japan and from all over the world for being here with us today.

The population of Ibaraki Prefecture currently stands at 3 million. The prefecture ranks third out of 47 prefectures in gross agriculture production and ninth in shipment of industrial products. I think there are about 17,000 researchers and around 5000 university professors living in the city of Tsukuba. Although this technology-oriented city with its abundance of nature is steadily growing, it is still surrounded by a profusion of environmental problems.

In Kasumigaura for example water pollution is advancing at an alarming rate. Unlike the past, factory wastewater does not account for the majority of the pollution. It accounts for 4 to 5 %, and majority of the rest is caused by water discharged from residences and apartments or from pollutant source such as agricultural fields and forest land. Various types of research are being conducted to see if this can't be steered in a somewhat better direction. We want to make a determined effort to see if nitrogen or phosphorus can be removed by some organic method, for instance, and we are currently beginning to conduct validation experiments concerning electrolysis. We are also going to build the Kasumigaura Environmental Center and are aiming for completion in 2004.

There is a waste incineration facility in nearby Shintone-machi called the Shirotori Cleaning Plant. A serious dioxin problem occurred here in 1998 following the Tokorozawa dioxin problem. A professor from a certain university in Osaka studied blood samples taken from 18 people living in the area, and announced that he had discovered as maximum as 400 something pg of dioxin in one of the subjects. The mean value was about 100 pg.

Hearing this, in order to make sure that there is never again an outbreak of Minamata, with the guidance of the researchers at the National Environmental Research Center, we invested about 57 million yen in a detailed study of 120 people who have lived here for a long time selected from the general population. There may be various questions concerning a study conducted exclusively in Japan, we enlisted the cooperation of ERGO Laboratory of Germany to conduct an independent study to confirm the findings of the study we conducted. The 9.7 pg mean value of the 120 people in the study we conducted was lower than the findings from a similar study conducted near the incineration facilities.

There was a great deal of anxiety among local people during this time however. It is difficult to know how the data about environmental hormones should be interpreted and is hard to see the full picture. Various figures were obtained from the studies, but when informed of the exact amount discovered in their own blood, people don't know what they should do about it. The problem is very difficult. I think the local people would be very grateful if we could get an idea about how to proceed with these and other problems through symposiums such as this.

The Shirotori Cleaning Plant I mentioned a little while ago has been refurbished and now operated sufficiently below strict standards. We have also created a dioxin analysis laboratory in the prefecture, and are conducting a study of dioxin each year. At the present, we are not getting high dioxin readings. As I mentioned before, however, there are still many scientifically unknown fields concerning environmental

hormones, but we anticipate further progress in the future by having the world's foremost researchers gathering together at events such as this. I would be particularly delighted if significant benefits can be derived from this symposium held in Tsukuba.

As you know, Tsukuba has a unique status among cities in Japan, so I think it is fitting that the city itself serves as a site for visiting. We wish you great success in your endeavors here and we hope you will take time to enjoy nearby Mt. Tsukuba and Kasumigaura while you are here. Thank you very much.