

Visitor Salutations

Shuichi Kato

Member of the House of Councilors, Japan
Chairman of Environmental Hormones Project Team

My name is Shuichi Kato, of the New Komeito. It was my sincere desire to have a large number of people from NGOs, experts and government people attend the symposium that began today so it would be a significant conference for ensuring our safety. I am also delighted to have the conference held in Tsukuba, Ibaraki Prefecture. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to everybody at the Ministry of the Environment, Ibaraki Prefecture, Tsukuba and the Japan Society of Endocrine Disrupter Research for their huge effort in making this conference possible.

The New Komeito was the first to address the problem of environmental hormones in the National Diet. Along with revealing an emergency proposal for environmental hormones consisting of 23 items in 4 fields, the related committee was able to take quick action to press the government to come up with affirmative provisions and budget measures and for addressing the problem. The New Komeito revealed an emergency proposal for addressing the problem of dioxin contamination in 1998. The party also revealed an original proposal concerning its commitment to the Law Concerning Special Measures against Dioxins. A consensus among all factions in the Diet was reached in July 1999, and the law will go into effect in December 2002. Because the Ministry of the Environment is contemplating the maximum response, the stock problem still remains, but we are hopeful that effectiveness of the plan will be enhanced.

Concerning countermeasures against environmental hormones, we were very interested in the fact that the New Komeito was the first party to address the problem of environmental hormones in the National Diet and proactive measure of Rule No. 15 of the Utilization Declaration of 1992 concerning development and the environment. Also related to this was the fact that environmental standards for children who is the environmental weak were emphasized in the declaration of the G8 Environmental Minister's Meeting held in Miami USA in 1997. For these reasons also the New Komeito feels that proactive principles are extremely important. The party has spoken out for the need for the Chemical Substances Safety Basic Law. The concerned committee in the National Diet -- as well as in full session-- has taken up introduction of environmental standard for children and proposes proactive principles for the structure of society. Our efforts do not stop at mere proposals; we are widely involved in a signature-collecting campaign and petitions based on the constitution.

As for part of this, in Ibaraki Prefecture this year, over 165,000 signatures concerning elucidation and research of environmental hormones in Kasumigaura were collected primarily in the Kasumigaura area. Environmental hormones are suspected of being responsible for atrophy of the testicles and other abnormalities of the sexual organs in *sinotaia quadrata histrica* in Kasumigaura, and the signatures were obtained from the hundreds of thousands of people that live in the area and are uneasy about using tap water. The petition was adopted unanimously by all factions of the environmental committee of the House of Councilors, taking another step forward in the fight against environmental hormones. I would therefore like to take the opportunity to thank all the people who live in the prefecture and cooperated in the signature-collecting campaign.

In addition to this, we obtained more than 500,000 signatures concerning this problem in Niigata Prefecture, which amounts to one out of every four people in the prefecture. These signatures reflect the concern mothers have for the environment in which their children will grow up. But mothers are not the only ones concerned about the environment; it shows that grandfathers and grandmothers are also strongly

thinking about their grandchildren. The signatures clearly indicate that people desire basic laws for ensuring the safety of chemical substances and laws that ensure the safety of the environment for children. Because of the fact that the use of chemical substances is spreading on a global scale, the fact that even miniscule quantities that used not to be a problem have an effect, because of problems of reproduction control, because of the tendency for chemical substances to accumulate in the body, because of biological concentration, because it takes time for the effect to appear, because effects pass on to the next generation, and because it is difficult to identify cause-effect relationship, there is a great deal of concern for unborn and newborn babies. These things further complicate the problem, but social arrangements for proactive principles are quite important for the future.

Concerning other actions in terms of environmental hormones, our approach to Minister Kawaguchi concerning proactive principles, our submission of official summary report concerning studies, research and elucidation of environmental hormones at Kasumigaura and our proposals concerning abnormalities of the sexual organs of children born in the Kasumigaura area are quickly responded by the Ministry of the Environment.

The fact that this symposium on environmental hormones is being held in Ibaraki Prefecture is very significant for the problems of Kasumigaura and environmental hormones. I would sincerely like to thank everybody involved for having a Kasumigaura corner.

The proactive principles are for the concern that many mothers expressed in interviews and to prevent substances such as environmental hormones from having an effect on unborn and newborn babies. It is an important obligation of the current generation to protect newborn babies and children as future generations. In relation to this, one of the things I especially want to bring up is toys made of soft PVC. Chemical substances like plasticizers such as ester phthalate and stabilizers such as bisphenol A, which are toxic to the liver and reproductive system, are added to polyvinyl chloride to make it soft.

When the New Komeito expressed its demands concerning environmental hormones to the government, 23 items in 4 fields were indicated. Among those were toys for children and childcare goods, as well as development of substitutes for these. We are also working on sick house syndrome, oversensitivity to chemicals and allergies issues. The New Komeito has obtained the signatures of more than 14 million people concerning countermeasures against allergies and made great steps forward in implementing these measures.

Environmental NPOs are enthusiastically involved in restrictions for soft PVC toys. Local governments on the other hand are worth noting as a recent domestic movement concerning restrictions on these toys. The Kanagawa Prefecture Kawasaki Inquiry Commission unanimously adopted a statement of opinion concerning toys not made of PVC in June this year. The statement of opinion was similarly approved by the Chiba Prefecture Assembly in July this year.

In order to prevent chemical substances such as environmental hormones from harming the health of children and infants, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government at the capital of Japan, established strict standards and guidelines for children in November this year, and is promoting the switch to substitute substances. With the first being established during 2001, it has just started out in a clear direction.

Thus there is a new movement concerning chemical substances as environmental hormones toward infants and children. What about the Ministry of the Health, Labour and Welfare? Although they are anxious, they try to take some concrete action. However their actions are based on application of the Food Sanitation Law created in 1947, in other words based on food products. The ministry aims for creation of planning standards on the human use level, and the standards are still somewhat hard to be understood. The following has therefore been pointed out: Plastic plasticizers used in toys are not additives as stipulated in the Food Sanitation Law and are not used in food and beverages; it goes without saying that soft PVC toys are not food for newborn babies. This is ambiguous and could easily be ineffective.

Eighteen countries already have laws that regulate the use of ester phthalate in toys. Warnings and advisories concerning the substances have been put out by the governments of five countries including the United States. Taking maximum advantage of the valuable lessons learned with Minamata Disease, the Japanese government should clearly take an active stance concerning creation of environmental standards for newborn babies and children and regulations concerning the use of soft PVC toys. I think laws concerning the safety of food should sometimes be reviewed from the standpoint of proactive principle and in the future this should be considered for childcare goods as well.

A tentative agreement on persistent chemicals such as PCB and dioxin was reached at the 5th International Conference on Persistent Organic Contaminants in the last December and was adopted this year. This is the first international agreement that obligates signatory nations to ban manufacture and use of organic chemicals and reduce discharge of such substances into the environment. The 12 chemical substances covered by the convention are already restricted by law in Japan, but I think we should prepare a domestic plan without delay and should promote implementation. By merit of the Law Concerning Special Measures against PCBs, detoxification of PCB is beginning to happen. The law succeeds in obligating proper treatment for storage of pesticides and the like and makes it mandatory to identify where chemicals remain in the soil. Having at one time disposed of DDT and herbicides as landfill, Japan also has to take care of this problem.

According to a study conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries no long ago, from what we have determined alone, 3680 tons of organic chloride pesticides that ceased to be sold around 1970 have been buried at 174 sites in 31 prefectures. Some of the chemicals are suspected of being environmental hormones and therefore require sufficient countermeasures including monitoring and detoxification. Our party is extremely concerned with this problem and we want something done about it.

The New Komeito is determined to work actively toward legislation such as the Chemical Substances Safety Basic Law, a law that calls for cleaning up contaminated soil and the Health Basic law. We are also for realization of international regulations concerning environmental hormones and environmental guidelines that establish an international standard for export credit. The "RIO + 10" World Summit will be held in 2002, at which comprehensive review of "Agenda 21", the index for global environmental problems, will be discussed. The government of Japan should also positively consider the proactive principles for the future. Concerning proactive principles, we urge the government to do its best to bring about adoption of the Global Charter promoted by Gorbachev and others by the UN and we of the New Komeito declare our active commitment to it as well. Thank you very much for being here today.