



7. Health Damages Caused by Minamata Disease

Not only did Minamata Disease contaminate the environment and threaten the lives of people and creatures, but it was also the cause of discrimination. Let us explain how it damaged people's health.

MINAMATA DISEASE IS NOT CONTAGEOUS.



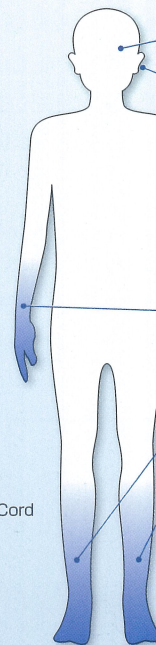
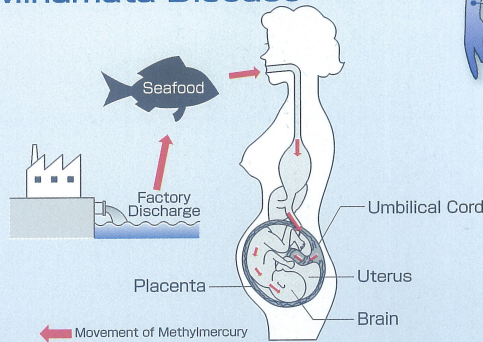
Minamata Disease Symptoms

After continuously ingesting methylmercury contaminated seafood, the brain and nervous system are damaged, causing a number of symptoms in humans. In severe cases, victims die soon after having contracted the disease.

Minamata Disease damages the body of those who ingest methylmercury. It is not airborne or hereditary, and does not spread through contact. Also, it is not endemic to the Minamata region.

Fetal and Infantile Minamata Disease

Pregnant mothers who ingested methylmercury transferred it to their fetus via the umbilical cord, causing babies to be born with Minamata Disease (Fetal Minamata Disease). Some infants also became victims (Infantile Minamata Disease).

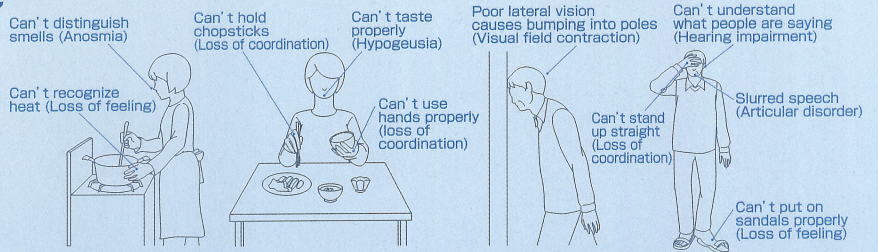


- Visual field contraction**
Difficulty in seeing surroundings when looking straight
- Hearing impairment**
Difficulty in hearing
- Loss of coordination**
Arms and legs do not move smoothly
- Weakness dominant in distal of limbs**
Feeling and pain felt in arms and legs becomes less toward the tips of the limbs.
- Other symptoms**
Equilibrium Disorder (unsteady on feet), Articular Disorder (slurred speech), Tremor (shaking), Taste Disorder, Anosmia (loss of smell) etc.

A disease with all these symptoms was named "Hunter-Russel Syndrome" after the person who first reported symptoms of mercury poisoning.

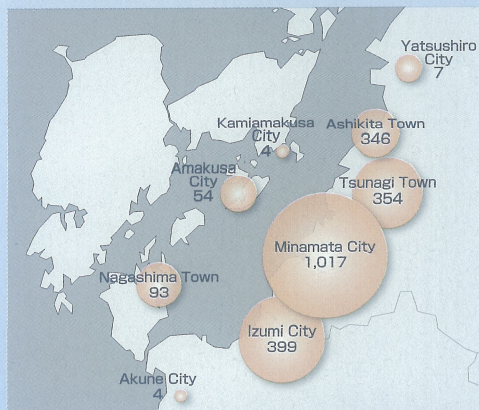
Living With Minamata Disease

The symptoms of Minamata Disease are difficult to recognize, but affect everyday life in various ways. Physical pain is of course one, but we must not forget the psychological strain caused by a lack of understanding among non-sufferers. No fundamental treatment for Minamata Disease has yet been found, and currently only temporary measures such as pain killers and rehabilitation are the main treatments.



Reference: Illustrated Minamata Disease (revised edition)

Distribution of Certified Minamata Disease Victims



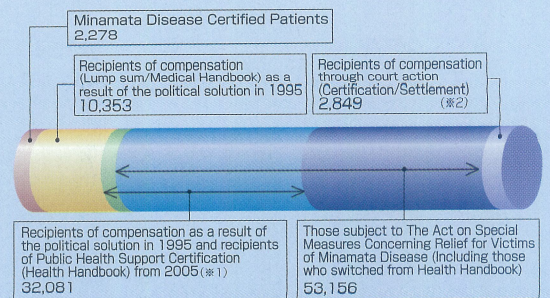
Note 1. Confirmed cases. City and town districts as of end of December 2015

Note 2. Circle sizes relative to patient numbers and not limited to residential districts of patients

(Created by Minamata Disease Municipal Museum)

Damage to Health of Victims

(As of end of December 2015) * Kumamoto/Kagoshima Prefectures



(Created by Minamata Disease Municipal Museum)

* Note 1: Total number of victims subject to the 1995 political solution (Health Handbook) 1,187 plus those subject to the decision of the Kansai High Court suit plus those who re-applied and were issued a Health Handbook between 2005 and 2010.
* Note 2: Total number is made up of the 4 victims certified in the Second Kumamoto Minamata Disease Court Case plus 51 victims certified in the Kansai Court Case plus 2,794 victims who were subject to relief in the No More Minamata Court Case Settlement.

8. Victim's Struggles for the Compensation and the Certification System



In 1968, the Japanese government officially concluded that Minamata Disease was a disease caused by pollution. This again brought the issue of compensation for those patients who had previously entered into a "Sympathy Money Contract." New Minamata Disease victims appeared and demanded the government provide certification, and more filed suits seeking compensation, commencing a long protracted battle with the company and government.

During this fight for compensation, a political solution was reached in 1995. In 2009, the Act on Special Measures Concerning Relief for Victims of Minamata Disease provided relief for over 60,000 people in Kumamoto and Kagoshima Prefectures.

However, there have been applications for certification and subsequent trials against government, and the Minamata Disease issue is still not over.



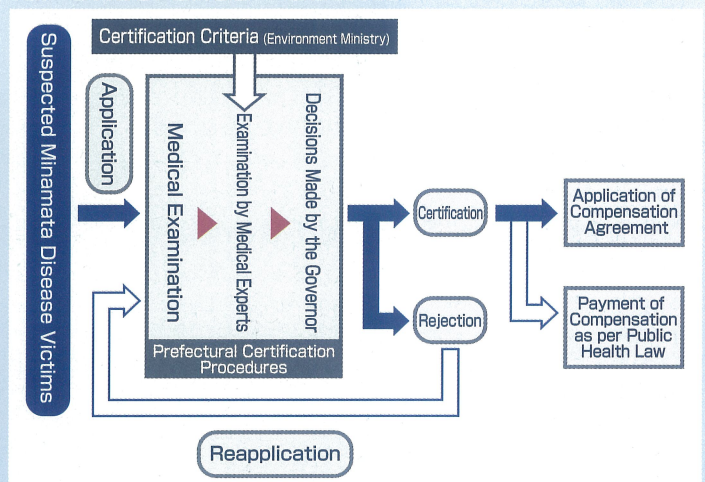
The "Grudge" Flag

Victims first sued Chisso for compensation in June 1969 (The First Kumamoto Minamata Disease Lawsuit). The victims, who having endured sickness, bias and discrimination, expressed all their feelings through a single Chinese character: 怨, pronounced "on", which translates as "Grudge," and made a flag featuring this character, which they used when supporting the plaintiffs in their court case. This flag came to be the symbol of the struggle of the victims of Minamata Disease.

Winning a Compensation Agreement at the Tokyo Negotiations



Certification System and Relief for Uncertified Patients



Kansai Lawsuit Questions the Responsibility of Nation and Prefecture



The only group which rejected the 1995 political solution and continued court action were those who moved from the coastal area of Yatsushiro to the Kansai Region and filed the Kansai Lawsuit.

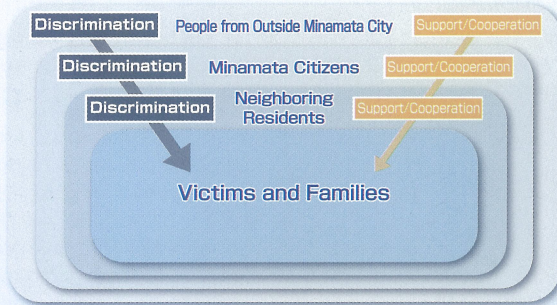
The decision by the Supreme Court in October 2004 found that "The Nation and Prefecture were liable for failing to prevent the expansion of Minamata Disease after 1960".

This decision led many more to apply for certification and sue for compensation. In order to expedite compensation, the government enacted The Act on Special Measures Concerning Relief for Victims of Minamata Disease.

9. Social Damages Caused by Minamata Disease

Due to the outbreak of this “strange disease” of which the cause was unknown, it was mistakenly thought to be contagious, leading to discrimination against victims and their families. Even after it was determined not to be a contagious disease, conflicts of interest within communities led to further discrimination. In addition, misunderstanding by people from outside the Minamata City region caused this discrimination to spread.

Leafletting Strategy -Community Division-



The Structure of Bias and Discrimination

This wall display shows leaflets from the side of the families and supporters, and citizens who stood up for Chisso.

Chisso was the cause of the disease, but it was also the biggest company in the region and had a strong influence over the citizens of Minamata City. If the local seafood wouldn't sell, the fishermen would suffer economic hardship. And even though people knew that Minamata Disease was not contagious, the fact that there were victims in the city made some people uncomfortable. This led to a rift between victims and their families, as well as other citizens, ripping apart the bonds that held the community together.

Despite this adverse social environment, the Citizens Council on Minamata Disease was established as a movement to support victims and their families.



Discrimination Toward Citizens of the Minamata Region

Misunderstanding of Minamata Disease led to discrimination toward not only victims, but all people from Minamata City by those from outside the region. People were refused jobs and had marriage proposals turned down just because they were from Minamata City. It is also said that trains and buses even went as far as closing windows when passing through Minamata.

The name Minamata Disease tarnished the image of the city and led to discrimination. This led to a movement to change the name of the disease.

10. Putting Yourself in Patients' Shoes

~Simulations of Health Damages~

It is hard to understand what victims go through. By experiencing the loss of physical mobility, you can get a sense of how hard it is for Minamata Disease victims. We hope this will lead to better understanding.



11. Environmental Restoration and the "Moyai Naoshi" (Reuniting) Program

In 1968, Chisso ceased the production of acetaldehyde, but the mercury contaminated sediment remained in Minamata Bay. In 1977, Kumamoto Prefecture commenced the Minamata Bay Environmental Restoration Project (Minamata Bay Pollution Prevention Project). This resulted in 58 hectares of reclaimed land being constructed in Minamata Bay in 1990. Thus began an opportunity for Minamata to reestablish the community bonds that were severed by the Disease, and to build a safe community with improved medical and welfare services.



11-1. Minamata Bay Environmental Restoration Project

The Minamata Bay Environmental Restoration Project, which removed mercury contaminated sediment and reclaimed land in the bay, started in 1977 and was completed 13 years later in 1990 at a cost of ¥48.5 billion, restoring the safe environment of Minamata Bay. The reclaimed land is currently a park with the theme of environment and health (Eco Park Minamata).

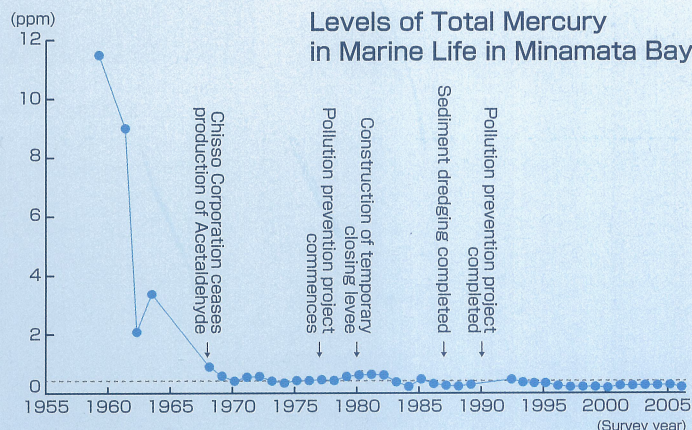


Before Reclamation



After Reclamation

Much time and effort was required to restore Minamata Bay to the same condition as other seas.



(Notes)
 1. Mercury levels are average levels of all fish surveyed in that year
 2. Dotted line denotes national provisional regulation levels for mercury in fish (Total mercury 0.4ppm)
 (Reference: Kumamoto Prefecture's "Minamata Bay Environmental Restoration Project" outline)

Shift in Pollution Levels

In 1997, after the survey of fish had found that mercury levels were below the provisional regulation levels set by the Japanese Government (total mercury 0.4ppm, methylmercury 0.3ppm) for three consecutive years, Kumamoto Prefecture declared Minamata Bay as safe, and for the first time in 23 years the dividing nets was removed from the bay. The prefecture continues to conduct annual water quality, seabed quality and marine life surveys, confirming that safe environmental conditions in Minamata Bay and surrounding waters have been maintained.

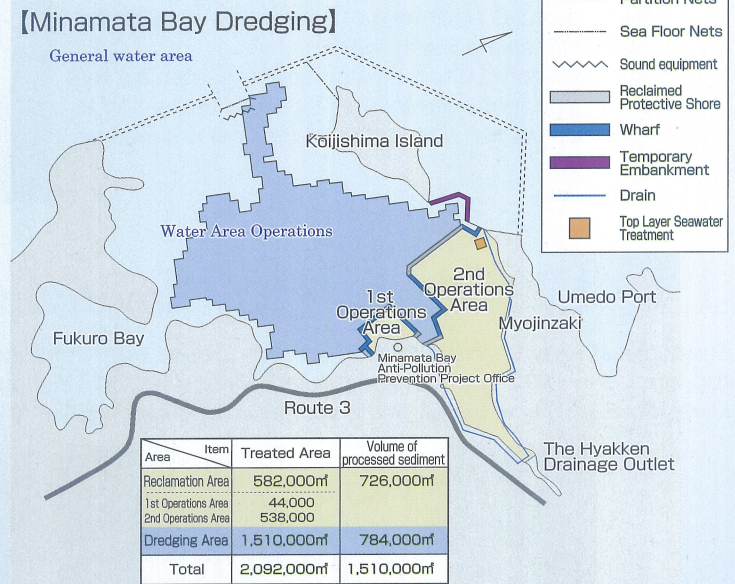
Dividing Net

Even after the Chisso Minamata factory stopped manufacturing acetaldehyde in 1968, fish and shellfish containing levels of mercury exceeding the provisional regulatory standards on the level of mercury in fish and shellfish, enacted by the government, inhabited the bay. Considering this fact and the harmful rumors about the bay, Kumamoto Prefecture installed dividing nets to trap contaminated fish within Minamata Bay.



Minamata Bay Pollution Prevention Project

In 1977, Kumamoto Prefecture initiated the Minamata Bay Pollution Prevention Project to dispose of sedimentary sludge containing mercury levels over the standard calculated based on regulatory standards for the removal of bottom sedimentary sludge (Total mercury 25ppm).



Reference: Kumamoto Prefecture's Minamata Bay Environmental Restoration Project

Project Works Issues

In 1977 some citizens, fearing secondary contamination, filed a court injunction to halt works, and the project was temporarily stopped. However, the injunction was overruled in 1980 and work on the bay recommenced. During the project, the supervisory committee was open to the public, and the content of the project works and supervisory results were posted daily in Minamata City. Thus, work proceeded while gaining the understanding of the local public.



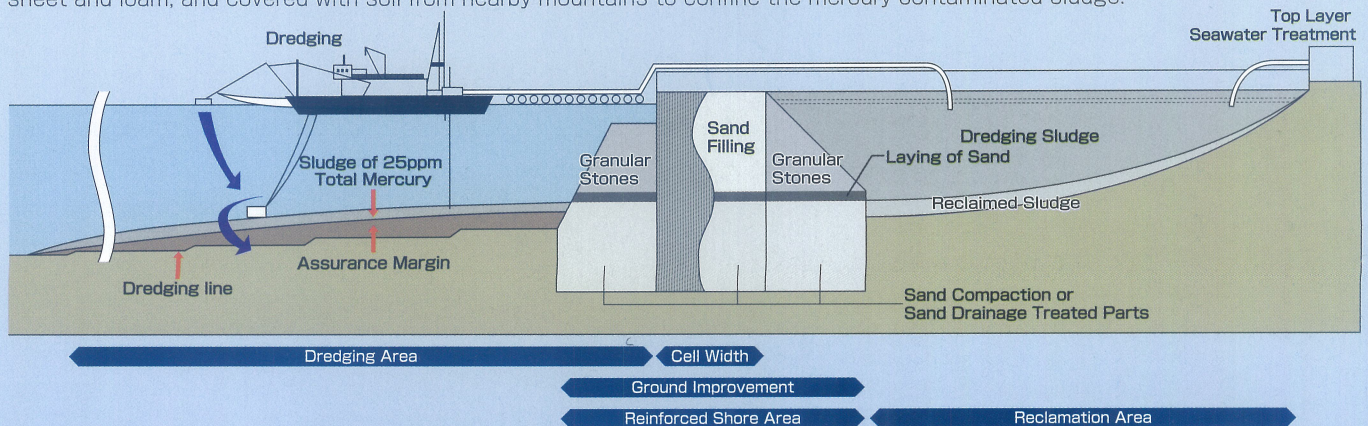
Construction of the reinforced shore using steel sheet pile cells



Dredging using a cutterless pump dredging ship

Operations

This project saw the deepest part of the bay (approximately 580,000 m²), where mercury content was high, enclosed with a metal sheet, and the areas of low mercury density (approximately 1,510,000 m²) which had about 780,000 m³ of sedimentary sludge, dredged with a cutterless pump ship and poured into a reclaimed land area. The ground surface was then treated with a synthetic sheet and loam, and covered with soil from nearby mountains to confine the mercury contaminated sludge.



11-2. The Launch of the "Moyai Naoshi" Initiative

The term "moyai" originally meant to tie boats together, or to cooperate in doing something. Once the connections between people and people and nature were broken in this region, the people had to face Minamata Disease head on. Through dialog and cooperation, they were able to repair the broken bonds and reconcile with one another. This is what is meant by "Moyai Naoshi."

Change through Citizens Dialog



Storytellers



Kokoro Festival



Mayor's Address

– May 1st 1994 Minamata Disease Victims Remembrance Ceremony



In his address at the Minamata Disease Victims Remembrance Ceremony on May 1st, 1994, the Mayor of Minamata issued the first ever official apology to the victims.



Minamata Disease Victims Memorial



Fire Festival



Minamata Memorial



11-3. Medical and Welfare Supports

In order to facilitate a safe living environment where the aging population of Minamata Disease victims and their families can live in their home town, measures have been taken to provide ample medical and welfare facilities. Here, we introduce some of the main facilities.

Meisuien Park



Hotaru-no-ie (Firefly House) Hothouse



12. Eternal Memories

Many people perished after contracting Minamata Disease. And the destruction of nature which took place at the time cannot be undone.

The people who lived through it, their lifestyles, those important people you want to remember. This is a place to bring back those Eternal Memories.

Communicate with the people, the nature and the scenery of those days.

