

## **Zero Waste Campaign**

Household waste in Kamikatsu used to be burned in an open pit until the town put two small incinerators into operation in 1998. However, the incinerators were shut down in 2000 due to national regulations on dioxin emissions. The town then sent its garbage to Yamaguchi Prefecture for disposal, but that was too expensive to continue. The next step was establishing the goal of recycling to avoid using either landfills or incinerators. Kamikatsu currently recycles 80 percent of its waste, compared to the national average of around 20 percent.

### *Sharing the Burden*

The community began by increasing the categories for garbage separation from the original nine it began with in 1997. The number jumped to 22 in 1998, and then to 35 in 2001. In 2003, Kamikatsu became the first municipality in Japan to adopt the Zero Waste Declaration, which aimed to eliminate waste incineration and landfills by 2020. There has never been door-to-door waste collection by garbage trucks in Kamikatsu. Residents have cooperated to reduce the financial burden on the town by composting all organic waste at home and by bringing their non-organic waste to the Waste Center where they sort it into 45 categories.

A number of innovative ideas help motivate residents to cooperate. One example is the Chiritsumo loyalty program, which rewards sorting things like paper, detergent pouches, toothbrushes, and disposable heating pads with points that can later be exchanged for merchandise. The program is designed to incentivize waste separation while raising awareness that recyclables have value. For instance, selling paper as a recyclable commodity brought in revenue of ¥13 per kilogram in 2019. Other initiatives include loyalty points for refusing plastic bags when shopping, and for bringing containers for takeout food and when buying items like soy sauce that are sold in bulk by volume in order to decrease packaging waste. Families with newborns have been given reusable cloth diapers since 2017.

### *Join the Effort*

Various programs allow visitors to experience the local lifestyle, including separating garbage into 45 categories and cooking with local ingredients. Inow is a two-week program launched in July 2020. Participants live in a private home reserved for the program, thereby integrating as honorary members of the local community for the duration of the program. By living in the town, they can learn about “zero waste” through participating in the town’s lifestyle, such as experiencing waste separation on a daily basis, practicing organic farming, making traditional crafts, and cooking with local, seasonal ingredients. In addition, businesses in Kamikatsu accept interns interested in the zero-waste program who can stay for anywhere from a few days to several months.

### *Ongoing Challenge*

Kamikatsu has entered a new phase beyond the initial focus on recycling versus incineration, which was the goal for 2020 under the Zero Waste Declaration. They are now seeking to stop waste at its origin, and are working with businesses to change individual mindsets about generating waste. For example, trash like artificial leather bags and sanitary products such as diapers are difficult to recycle due to their material composition or for hygiene reasons. A 100 percent recycling rate cannot be achieved through the efforts of Kamikatsu alone, and partnerships with manufacturers are essential.