



COUNTRY	CITY	POPULATION	RATE OF RECYCLING AND REUSE	NATIONAL WASTE PRODUCTION
JAPAN	KAMIKATSU	1,457 (2020)	80% (20% AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL)	41,670,000 T (2020; -2.5% COMPARED TO 2019)

Kamikatsu • A social project beyond the zero waste objective

Per capita waste generation in Japan is among the lowest in the [OECD](#), but the recycling rate (20% in 2020) is below average. In this regard, the municipality of Kamikatsu, which recycles or reuses [80%](#) of its waste, serves as a model. This is the outcome of a pioneering declaration made in [2003](#), when the city pledged to achieve “zero waste” by 2020, concentrating initially on improvements in recycling before insisting more recently on prevention in order to reduce waste production upstream. The success of its sorting centre is hinged on community involvement in the project. Its reputation as a “[Zero Waste Town](#)” also makes it more attractive for younger populations.

A municipal project part of a wider national approach

Because of the nature of its borders, Japan was quickly confronted with limitations in its landfill capacity. The “[Basic Act for establishing a sound material-cycle society](#)” of 2001 is based on the principle of the 3Rs: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. It aimed, among other things, to reduce household waste by 25% and corporate waste by 35% by 2020.

Kamikatsu closed its two incinerators in 2000, following [new](#) control measures, and with the help of the NGO Zero Waste Academy, it is counting on recycling and, ultimately, achieving zero waste. The initiative taken by the town in 2003 was facilitated by the decentralisation of waste management in [1997](#). In 2004, the town established a [fund](#) for the project and in 2014, it appointed “zero waste advocates” to enhance the prevention component.

In addition to sorting, the [project](#) also encourages waste prevention, in a context where the generation of waste is unfortunately still [increasing](#): from 283 tonnes in 2018 to 302 tonnes in 2019. The prevention component echoes the objective of the 2001 law to establish a [Sound Material-Cycle Society \(SMCS\)](#). The sorting centre building also hosts an awareness and learning centre, a shared laboratory, and the WHY hotel. Residents of the town and surrounding areas must sort their waste according to [45 categories](#) – the

rest is still sent to an incinerator. While the constraints associated with recycling – transport to the sorting centre, cleaning of waste upstream, the relatively large number of sorting categories – have led to some complaints, they have contributed to the adoption of new habits; the less waste a resident produces, the less they will have to go to the sorting centre.

At the same time, Zero Waste Academy has encouraged industries and manufacturers to recycle, and made them aware of the issue of illegal landfills. As an incentive, it also accredits certain businesses that meet the objectives of the “[Zero Waste Map](#)”.

Considering waste as a resource

Kamikatsu’s results are also reliant on a circular economy, complementing recycling actions. Globally, only [9%](#) of plastics and [13.5% of solid waste](#) are recycled. Various activities have been undertaken to limit the amount of waste to treat. The town has established the [Chiritsumo point system](#), where points can be won by sorting waste which can be exchanged for “essential ecological” products.

This municipal initiative is spreading to local businesses. The Kuru-Kuru shop and workshop were founded in 2006 and 2007 to promote a second life for some objects which are donated by the inhabitants and redistributed for free. The Rise & Wine

Company, for its part, reuses misshaped grains to brew two types of beer, and since 2021 it has been converting unused grains into liquid fertilizer for farmers, who use it to grow the barley used for the beer.

The WHY hotel promotes an “anti-waste” policy, particularly at its restaurant, and the Polestar Cafe offers only a single choice of meal to avoid waste. The hotel and store are built from recycled and salvaged materials. The tendency to overpack goods, however, is still proving difficult to eradicate.