

ABOUT US

Offices Kinshicho and
Sagamihara
Telephone: 03 5637 8809
Web
www.tomtom-english.com
Email
kinshicho@
tomtom-english.com



@tomtomenglish



Tom Tom English (Kinshicho)
Tom Tom English(Sagamihara)



TOM TOM ENGLISH



VOCABULARY

Abrasive =

Causing damage by rubbing or wearing

Unfounded =

Having no proof or basis in fact

Allegation =

A claim that someone has usually done something wrong (often with no evidence)

Sanitise =

To make clean and hygienic

Read the article overleaf and discuss these questions:

1. Do you suffer from hay fever? If so, how long have you suffered from it? What symptoms do you have? Is it a big problem for you?
2. What do you think about Sonomama Higashi's allegation? Do you think it's true? Why? Why not?
3. Do you think it's true that our environment is over-sanitised?
4. Do you have any other allergies? What are you allergic to?
5. Do you think the government should do something about the kafunsho problem? If so, what should it do? If not, why not?

VOCABULARY

Lumber =

Wood cut into boards, planks of other useful pieces

Aggravating =

Something that is annoying or exasperating

Saplings =

A young tree

Denude =

To strip something of its covering

A man flags down a taxi and hops inside. “Sheesh! The pollen today is awful!” he exclaims, instead of greeting the driver. Yes, reports Jitsuwa Bunka Tabuu, this is the sort of thing you can expect to see between early February and April when Japanese cedars release huge clouds of their fine, **abrasive** pollen. For millions of suffering Japanese, it means sneezes, runny noses and itchy eyeballs.

On a recent instalment of Beat Takeshi’s “TV Tackle” program, Sonomama Higashi was heard to make such **unfounded allegations** as “The reason the government doesn’t get rid of the cedar trees causing the allergies is that it wants to assist the businesses that profit from selling goods.”

But let’s be sensible, says the writer. In the background of these allergies are efforts by humans to **sanitise** their environment. By cleansing ourselves of bacteria and parasites, we become over-sensitized, causing our bodies to react violently to all sorts of things: meat, eggs, or diesel exhaust gases.

How did this situation come to pass? According to a physician at Tokyo Medical and Dental University, it was in 1963 that the term “kafunsho” first began to be used for sufferers. Afterwards, the number of patients began to soar after exceptionally heavy pollen levels in 1976 and 1979.

Those years coincided with the period when housing demand, and with it the demand for native woods soared, as postwar baby boomers began starting families. This was all part of a plan foreseen and implemented in the early 1950s to use “sugi” (Japanese cedar) and “hinoki” (Japanese cypress) for reforestation of the mountainous areas of

east Japan. Those trees began reaching their maturity from the 1980s.

However Japan opened up its markets to foreign **lumber** imports from 1964, and as the imported woods undersold the native Japanese products, Japan’s **lumber** self-dependence began dropping: from 95% in 1955 to 45% in 1970; 30% in 1980; and 20% since 2000. A trimmed cedar log used to sell for 4,800 yen; now it’s under 2,000.

Now you know why the offending trees aren’t getting cut down. Want to hear something even more **aggravating**? The government is still subsidizing the planting of new cedar **saplings** -16 million trees per year. Which means 30 years from now, we can expect history to repeat itself.

Is it worth the suffering? You be the judge: Compared with the forestry industry’s income from harvesting the cedars—estimated at around 100 billion yen per year—the pharmaceutical industry and related activities such as clinics, drug stores, etc. rake in three times as much—300 billion yen—for pollen allergy outlays.

At least the planners’ motives were sensible and realistic. The project to plant cedar forests came about through conservation efforts in the postwar era. High demand for wood products during the war had left forests **denuded**, and the resulting soil erosion and landslides during typhoons led to thousands of deaths in the 1940s. The trees served this purpose well.

On the other hand, about one Japanese in five suffers from hay fever. Three months a year of minor discomforts won’t kill you, says the magazine, but maybe we should think about how to handle the problem.