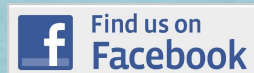


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TOM TOM ENGLISH



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 says, instead of greeting the driver. Jitsuwa Bunka Tabuu says that this kind of thing will happen a lot between early February and April. During this time Japanese cedars release huge clouds of their fine, **abrasive** pollen. For millions of Japanese, this means sneezes, runny noses and itchy eyeballs.

On a recent instalment of Beat Takeshi's "TV Tackle" program, Sonomama Higashi was heard to make some **unfounded allegations**. He said "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 too sensitive. Our bodies react violently to all sorts of things: meat, eggs, or diesel exhaust gases.

How did this happen? According to a doctor at Tokyo Medical and Dental University, the term "kafunsho" was first used in 1963. Afterwards, the number of patients began to rise after very heavy pollen levels in 1976 and 1979.

At the same time, housing demand soared. This meant that the demand for native woods soared, as postwar baby boomers began starting families and building houses. In the 1950s the government predicted this, and planted lots of "sugi" (Japanese cedar) and "hinoki" (Japanese cypress) in the mountainous areas of east Japan. Those

trees began reaching their maturity from the 1980s.

Unfortunately, Japan opened up its markets to foreign **lumber** imports from 1964. The imported woods were much cheaper than 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.

That's why the 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. This means that, 30 years from now, we can expect this pattern to repeat.

The forestry industry's income from harvesting the cedars is estimated at around 100 billion yen per year. On the other hand, the pharmaceutical industry and related activities such as clinics, drug stores, etc. make around 300 billion yen selling pollen-related products.

The project to plant cedar forests happened because of conservation efforts after the war. High demand for wood products during the war had left forests **denuded**. This caused soil erosion, and during typhoons landslides killed thousands of people in the 1940s.

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.