

## Aiming to be the leader in chemical plant risk communication



PRTR Grand Prize trophy

**Konica Minolta believes that two-way communication with stakeholders is the basis of CSR. Currently, the Community Environmental Briefings being held at the Tokyo and Odawara sites are earning accolades for their risk communication activities designed to gain the understanding of stakeholders regarding businesses that use chemical products.**

### Awarded first PRTR Grand Prize in Japan

The year 2004 closed with some positive news. The Environmental Information Science Center presented its first PRTR\* Grand Prize to the Konica Minolta Group in Japan.

The PRTR Grand Prize was established to reward companies successfully performing risk communication based upon their own initiative as a means of gaining community understanding about the status of environmentally harmful chemicals they manage.

The news about winning the award was immediately relayed to Tokyo Site and Odawara Site in the greater metropolitan area, where year-round Community Environmental Briefings have proved beneficial as a factor in receiving this award. Some of the staff commented that they felt their efforts were being rewarded, while others reflected that genuine advances have been made since the inaugural meeting in 2002.

\*PRTR stands for Pollutant Release and Transfer Register.

### Community Environmental Briefing ahead of the pack

Konica Minolta's Tokyo Site can be reached by taking a 30-minute ride on the Chuo Line's rapid train from Shinjuku Station to Toyoda Station, and then a several-minute car ride. The site is a historical one, where Japan's first color photo film was produced in 1940. At its inception, the plant was in a placid country setting, which has long since been supplanted by residential areas accompanying the rapid expansion of suburban communities.

The first Community Environmental Briefing was held on September 21, 2002 at the Tokyo Site. The previous year, the Japanese government enacted the PRTR Law obliging companies to report waste amounts and amounts for prescribed chemical substances. In view of the fundamental concepts of the PRTR Law, we began studying how to convey our environmental activities to

regional operations in Japan. The decision to organize Community Environmental Briefings at the Tokyo Site was because it is a large chemical plant and is surrounded by residential areas.

Although the staff were a bit anxious because no company had ever held such a meeting before, they prepared for the briefing, guided by the mission, "Disclosing the site's environmental measures to the community and fulfilling our accountability." They had no idea of the number of attendees, or who they would be, or what kinds of questions would be asked. At the same time, they had to decide what to explain and how, with no precedents to help them. However, amid such concerns, they let the staff know one small point: Since 1996 they had been meeting regularly with the head of the community association, thereby giving them a communication platform from which to start. Sincerity would win the day, they believed, and the staff seemed to agree.



Community Environmental Briefing at Tokyo Site

### What Konica Minolta learned at the briefing

The staff were particularly concerned about four issues. The first matter was "accessibility." No restrictions were placed on attendees, and prior notification was not required. Explanatory documentation that was used did not contain specialized terminology and were designed carefully so that average people could understand their contents. The second matter was "transparency." For example, expressions that may give a negative impression, like "reductions are not improving," were not

altered. The third concern was "continuity." Once the briefings had begun, they would have to be held every year thereafter. The fourth matter was "sincerity." They wanted to listen carefully to the wishes of the attendees and study ways to make improvements accordingly.

On the day of the briefing, 69 people attended from the local community, government, NPOs and other companies. Examples of the requests and suggestions were such recommendations as: "Report every year about key improvements concerning the release of chemical substances into the atmosphere and the amount of waste" and "Report the production volume for comparison with the quantity of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions." Many people also expressed their desire that we "continue holding such briefings in the future."

The briefing was extremely valuable in terms of learning about the opinions of the local community regarding the presence of a chemical plant nearby, and the importance of gaining their understanding.

### Community Environmental Briefing focusing on "sincerity"

In the following year of 2003, a similar Community Environmental Briefing was held at the Odawara Site, where again the chemical plant is in a residential area. From the second briefings at both the Tokyo and Odawara sites, particular emphasis has been placed on explanations that respond to the requests and opinions of the local communities. For instance, at the second briefing at the Odawara Site in fiscal 2004, the responses to the previous year's requests were explained in specific detail, one by one. As a result, most of the questionnaires filled in by the participants after the meeting indicated that Konica Minolta's "response was sincere."



Community Environmental Briefing at Odawara Site

### Facing new issues in risk communication

In January 2005, at the PRTR Grand Prize award ceremony, the judges praised the Community Environmental Briefings for the "clear and transparent" presentation of the facts.

Winning the Grand Prize served as a tremendous impetus to the staff and inspired them to aim for even higher quality risk communication, and they have already developed new ideas and topics. For example, as the concerns expressed in the Community Environmental Briefings are met and problems are solved, the number of participants decreases. To continue communicating with members of the community, the staff realize that they may need to freshly connect with participants as outside partners, and therefore, hold events that would gain community interest. Further, complex information about chemical substances should be presented in easily understood format, and the method of explanation should be well-rounded so that average people will understand the essential points.

In January 2005, an experimental risk communication model program deploying this new type of communication was implemented at the Kobe and Seishin sites in cooperation with the Hyogo Environment Creation Association and the Environmental Information Science Center. This program provided an opportunity for ordinary Kobe citizens to mingle with chemical substance advisors, government officials and other specialists, and opinions were exchanged about how to best provide information to the community.

How should we make the Community Environmental Briefings even better, and how should we continue interaction with the community and society at large from the viewpoint of the environment? In seeking the answers to such questions, Konica Minolta is tackling each of the issues as they emerge and will continue striving for the most effective risk communication.



1st PRTR Grand Prize presented to Konica Minolta Group in Japan at an awards ceremony