



ESG Insights

November Focus: Exciting Projects This Week, WN 45: Kitakyushu, the Japanese 'Eco-Town'

- *The city of Kitakyushu has promoted eco-friendly activities through close cooperation with its citizens, government and businesses, gaining international recognition as a model for environmental progress*
- *As of March 2017, ¥77 billion (US\$704 million) has been invested in the city's environmental projects, the majority of which are driven by the private sector*

OVERVIEW

Before Kitakyushu's emergence as an eco-town, it was home to the nation's first modern blast furnace, the government-owned *Yahata Steel Works*. It was in the city of Kitakyushu in 1901 that the modernised industry in Japan, which manufactures many of the products we are so familiar with today, began. However, following its rapid industrial development, the city's environmental standards took a turn for the worse. The city became so polluted that Dokai Bay Area was termed the "Sea of Death" as even bacteria had been unable to survive there.

OUTLOOK

Today, however, the city boasts a very different story. In order to combat its pollution levels, the city synergised its efforts through combining various strategies; namely education, research, policies, and investments, while emphasising on the approach of turning its weaknesses into strengths. The city leveraged on its historical manufacturing capabilities, which had partially led to such devastating pollution levels in the first place and channelled the accumulated knowledge and technology towards recycling and cleaning up the city. Kitakyushu now has five commercial and research complexes dedicated to various recycling efforts, such as the *Comprehensive Environmental Industrial Complex*, where plastic PET bottles, office equipment and even automobiles are recycled. Its Science and Research Park is focused on the development of avant-garde environmental technologies and researching areas of practical usage, such as biomass fuel manufacturing methods and carbonisation technologies for organic waste. The leaps and bounds that Kitakyushu has made in environmental technology has attracted researchers to the city from all over the world, having accepted 8,676 researchers from 161 countries since the 1960s, which has given rise to significant international environmental cooperation ties between Japan and the rest of the world.

OPPORTUNITY

Today, the Dokai Bay Area is home to over a hundred species of fish, which have returned due to its now pristine waters. The cleansing of the bay has been part of an extremely long and arduous process in improving the city's living environment, having received over ¥77 billion (US\$704 million) in investments as of March 2017, of which 74% was contributed by private investments. The progress that Kitakyushu made thus far will certainly put the city in the limelight as cities around the world look to solutions to reduce their pollution, live more sustainably and improve their surrounding environment. Case in point, Singapore has been termed the 'Garden City' for its efforts in preserving green space. Yet Singapore is facing constraints in its space, with its largest landfill Pulau Semakau predicted to reach capacity as early as 2035, despite carrying out waste incineration and extensive recycling efforts. The expertise, technology, and policies accumulated in Kitakyushu will certainly be modelled and sought after by cities like Singapore as we move toward a greener and cleaner future.