

The “Inamura no Hi” Puppet Show Project – Activities and Achievements –

Japan V

The “Inamura no Hi” (the Fire of Rice Sheaves) is a Japanese folktale based on the true story of a squire who noticed the very early signs of a tsunami triggered by a large-scale earthquake in 1854. As the story goes, the squire led his fellow villagers to high ground by burning his valuable harvested rice sheaves.

Inspired by the story, a SOMPO Japan employee who experienced the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in January 1995 appealed to puppet theater groups in Shizuoka Prefecture to develop a puppet show based on this tale, and the Inamura no Hi puppet show project was inaugurated in June 2003. By fiscal 2008, the puppet show has been performed a total of 38 times across the nation, conveying to about 9,500 children and adults what to do when an earthquake or a tsunami hits and the importance of mutual assistance. This group also participated in “the YOKOHAMA Bosai (disaster reduction) Fair 2007” held in December 2007 in Yokohama and which communicated the importance of enhancing the ability of local communities to cope with disasters.

On June 2007, we held a class for parents and children titled “The Fire of Inamura and the Paradise for Catfishes” to learn how to prevent disasters through the puppet show at the Yokohama Doll Museum. The Inamura no Hi is now gaining international recognition as an effective tool for disaster education, with the power to deeply impress children.



“Konta’s Fire of Rice Sheaves” performed by the Fresh puppet theater group

Even after the Inamura no Hi NPO puppet show project was incorporated, its operation was weakly financed and lacked adequate administrative capacity. Therefore, its activities are exposed to a considerably difficult situation, to the same extent as they were at the beginning. However, the NPO avoided dissolution several times, and everyone involved is working to ensure the continuation of its activities. We take great pleasure in teaching children in the audience about respect for human life and the dangers related to earthquakes and tsunamis. We are also thankful that our efforts have been supported by many people in various sectors, including the government, universities, the mass media, and disaster reduction volunteer organizations.

All disaster reduction activities, including disaster research, local disaster management plans, and corporate business continuity management (BCM) strategies, are important. However, it is of the utmost importance to teach as many people as possible about the significance of disaster preparedness, in order to protect lives.

It is impossible to capture the attention of citizens with complicated theories. The method of teaching the essence of disaster reduction through puppet shows that impress children and their parents has been proven effective in Shizuoka, a prefecture with advanced disaster reduction strategies. Today, disaster reduction education is taught not only through puppet shows, but also through a variety of media that interests children, including “shadow plays”, picture-story shows, and songs.

– **Background**

SOMPO Japan Insurance Inc. has 537 sales offices and 265 service centers in Japan, as well as overseas business bases in 93 cities in 29 countries around the world. Through its network of about 49,430 agents, SOMPO Japan is also serving the needs of respective local communities. (The figures are as of April 1, 2009).

Playing a positive role in addressing local problems together with its agents and working closely with local stakeholders, such as residents, government officials, and members of civil organizations (NPOs), finding solutions to such problems is an important responsibility that SOMPO Japan believes it should strive to fulfill as a member of the local community. Besides undertaking corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities, SOMPO Japan is offering support to the volunteer activities of each of its employees to serve the local community and is striving to create a work environment conducive to such activities.

– **Objective**

To offer SOMPO Japan’s knowledge to contribute to the disaster reduction efforts of respective local communities, both domestic and foreign, by implementing disaster reduction education through the Inamura no Hi puppet show.

– **Term/Time frame**

June 2003 to present

– **Activities undertaken**

- January 2004: The Inamura no Hi NPO puppet show project gives its first performance at the Shizuoka Prefectural Earthquake Preparedness Education Center in Shizuoka City.
- January 2005: Inamura no Hi is performed at the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR), held in Kobe.
- July 2005: The Cabinet Office of Japan posts information on the activities of the Inamura no Hi NPO puppet show project on its official website; the Inamura no Hi picture book is translated into nine languages for eight Asian countries hit by the Sumatra earthquake and tsunami, led by the Asian Disaster Reduction Center.
- October 2008: Deaf Puppet Theater Hitomi, a professional theater group consisting of deaf and non-impaired puppeteers, gives its first performance of Inamura no Hi and begins a three-year tour to visit and give performances to schools for the deaf at about 100 locations nationwide.

– **Major achievements**

- November 2005: SOMPO Japan receives the Commissioner for Cultural Affairs Award at the 2005 Japan Mecenat Awards, organized by the Association for Corporate Support of the Arts.
- March 2006: The Inamura no Hi NPO puppet show project receives the Director of the Institute for Fire Safety and Disaster Preparedness Award at the Disaster-Resistant Community Development Awards held by the Fire and Disaster Management Agency.

– **Contact details**

Corporate Social Responsibility Div.
 Corporate Communications Dept.
 SOMPO Japan Insurance Inc.
 1-26-1 Nishi-shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160-8338
 TEL: 03-3349-9258
 FAX: 03-3349-3304
 E-mail: Eco@sompo-japan.co.jp
 URL: <http://www.sompo-japan.co.jp>

– **Websites of related organizations**

- International Year of Planet Earth Japan <http://www.gsj.jp/iype/en/docs/psp-inamura.html>
- The Inamura no Hi NPO puppet show project <http://red.zero.jp/inamura/>
- Yamasa Corporation <http://www.yamasa.com/history/sevens.html>