

US-based social enterprise challenging waste management issues takes root in the new “home” in Yokohama.

TerraCycle Japan is the Japanese subsidiary of the US social enterprise, TerraCycle, which focuses on collecting and recycling plastic waste not to bury or incinerate waste. They began operations in Japan in January 2014, with their office initially located in the Minato Ward of Tokyo. However, they later relocated to Yokohama, a city that actively welcomes foreign affiliated companies. Currently, they are working in collaboration with local governments, such as Yokohama city, local businesses, and residents to tackle complex waste challenges.



Speaker: Eric Kawabata, Asia Pacific General Manager of TerraCycle



Recycling box located in Yokohama City

■ Recycling items previously thrown away or burned.

We are a US-based social enterprise that is creating innovative solutions to address waste management issues. We offer a recycling program for items that have traditionally been considered difficult to recycle. For example, we recycle used cosmetic containers and empty jelly drink pouch containers.

Recently, we have been developing a circular shopping platform called the “Loop”. By offering products in packages and containers for repeated use, such as glass containers, and we have gained support from many partners who agreed with our mission “Eliminate the Idea of Waste” After launching the “Loop” in the US and France in January 2019, we started operating this platform in Japan in May 2021, and it is currently available in three countries.

■ A desire to expand material recycling in Yokohama.

I was born in the US and am a person of Japanese descent. Since my first visit to Japan in 1992, I have been coming and going between Japan and the US on business. I used to think that Japan is a clean country and recycling might not be necessary. However, after doing some research, I found that there are many thermal recycling (heat recovery) methods used, and I now think that we should increase material recycling to reuse waste as new resources.

Since TerraCycle Japan began operating in 2014, I’ve had an interest in Yokohama City as well, where I have connections, and have visited the final disposal site in Honmoku. Until 2019, our office was located in Tokyo, however, even during that time, we had been considering expanding our business into Yokohama. In the summer of that same year, when I had almost given up on moving our base to Yokohama,

local stakeholders invited us to move into a vacant office space. Finally, in December of that year, we fulfilled our long-standing wish to move our base to Yokohama.

Since collaborating with Morinaga & Co., Ltd. in 2022, we have also been working on a program to collect empty jelly drink pouch containers at two7-ELEVEN stores in Yokohama City Hall.

Furthermore, Yokohama City provided us with opportunities for matching with local companies regarding our recycling program. We are grateful to local companies for establishing good business relationships with a foreign affiliated company like ourselves. International trade in Japan originally began in Yokohama, and we feel that Yokohama is the place where foreign affiliated companies are welcomed.

■ Demonstration experiment of the “Medicine Sheet Recycling Program”

Last October, we collaborated with Daiichi Sankyo Healthcare Co., Ltd. to launch a demonstration project in Naka-Ward, Yokohama as well as other wards in Yokohama, collecting and recycling used PTP sheets (medicine sheets used for the individual packaging for tablets). This recycling project is a pioneering initiative that can raise awareness for citizens and other businesses for material recycling. Regarding recycling medicine sheets, we worked hard to find partners, which also took a long time. After we found a partner, the main challenge was where to conduct a demonstration. In the end, we could finally realize this project thanks to the support of Yokohama City.

Thus, we feel Yokohama City is a city where business can easily be developed because local businesses welcome foreign affiliated companies, and municipalities also actively support their activities.

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