



A worker sorting newspapers and magazines for recycling at a waste center in the town of Kamikatsu, Tokushima prefecture. — AFP photos



Separated metal items at a waste center in the town of Kamikatsu, Tokushima prefecture.



A worker stacking sheets of compacted aluminum cans at a waste center in the town of Kamikatsu, Tokushima prefecture.



Bottles separated into drums at a waste centre in the town of Kamikatsu, Tokushima prefecture.



Kazuyuki Kiyohara, manager of a waste center, placing plastic waste into a compacting machine in the town of Kamikatsu, Tokushima prefecture.



Workers sorting trash at a waste centre in the town of Kamikatsu, Tokushima prefecture.

Getting to zero: The Japan town trying to recycle all its waste

Plastic, paper, metal? In Japan's Kamikatsu, sorting rubbish isn't that simple. Residents face a mind-boggling 45 separate categories for their garbage as the town aims to be "zero-waste" by 2020. And that's not all: there isn't even trash collection. The 1,500 residents of the town in western Japan have to transport their waste themselves to a local facility. "Yes, it's complicated," said Naoko Yokoyama, a 39-year-old resident who had brought her trash to the town's waste center. "But I have become more environmentally conscious since I moved here a year ago," she told AFP.

The categories cover everything from pillows to toothbrushes as the town aims to recycle all its waste, sending nothing to incinerators, by next year. The process can be onerous-not only are there dozens of separate categories, but items like plastic bags and bottles must be washed and dried to facilitate recycling. At the town's waste facility, there are dozens of different boxes for each category. If the parts of an item fall into different categories for recycling, residents are expected to take them apart and send each bit to the right container.

One man who had brought in a shelf had to use a hammer to prise the wood from the metal, while elsewhere workers chopped up a thick, long rubber tube so it would fit into a sorting box. Many parts of Japan already require separation of rubbish, but most areas have just a few categories, with the bulk of household waste going to incinerators.

'Let's recycle'

Kamikatsu was not much different until an ultimatum: in 2000, the town was ordered to shut down one of its incinerators because it no longer met stricter emissions standards. That left the town with just one incinerator that couldn't handle all of Kamikatsu's waste, and there wasn't enough money for a new one or to pay a neighboring town for use of theirs. "We thought, 'If we can't burn waste in the town,

then let's recycle.' It's cheaper to recycle waste than burn it," said town official Midori Suga. Kamikatsu is already close to achieving its goal, recycling about 80 percent of the 286 tons of waste it produced in 2017, far more than the national average of 20 percent.

The remainder, like most waste in Japan, is incinerated, as the country's mountainous terrain considered unsuitable for landfills.

The nation produces less general waste per person than most developed countries, but it generates more plastic waste per capita than anywhere except the United States. In the past, some plastic was exported for recycling, particularly to China, but a ban by Beijing on imports has left plastic recyclables piling up in parts of Japan.

Still, not all residents think the initiative could work elsewhere. "It works because we're only 1,500 people here," said Yokoyama, who moved from Kyoto. "It would be difficult in a big town with a larger population," she added, because authorities would struggle to enforce it.

Reduce consumption

But other residents say the policy is just common sense. "I understand it's convenient to just burn waste," said 71-year-old local Saeko Takahashi, as she washed milk cartons and tied newspapers together. "It's better to recycle, it's such a waste otherwise," she explained. She uses a compost bin for food waste such as fish and meat and throws vegetable waste directly into her garden. "Food lasts longer when it's shipped in plastic packaging. So it's not all bad, but multiple layers of plastic aren't necessary," added Takahashi.

Kazuyuki Kiyohara, manager of the waste center, said plastic makes up the majority of the residents' waste-and despite the scheme there has been little reduction in consumption. "Our lifestyle depends mainly on plastic," the 38-year-old said, adding: "Consumers can reduce plastic waste to a certain extent, but we'll still have waste if producers keep making

plastic products." In 2018, Japan's government unveiled a proposal to tackle plastic waste, with the goal of reducing the 9.4 million tonnes produced by the country each year by a quarter by 2030. The plan proposes that retailers should charge for plastic bags—a measure already widely adopted around the world—but that isn't expected to come into effect before 2020 and other types of plastic packaging won't be covered.



A stack of compacted aluminum cans at a waste center in the town of Kamikatsu, Tokushima prefecture.

Town official Suga said even Kamikatsu will struggle to achieve zero-waste without stronger efforts to reduce consumption. She said: "We have made efforts to achieve zero incineration and zero landfill disposal goals, but it's not enough." She explained: "We shouldn't focus just on how to dispose of trash. We need to come up with policies that prevent the production of waste." — AFP

Japan's anime industry in crisis even as its popularity soars

Japan's booming animation industry is in crisis—with low pay, long hours and a huge shortage of artists—just as its global popularity has never been higher. Three of the 10 feature films in the running for top prize at the world's most important animation festival in Annecy in France—which ends Saturday—are from Japan. The country is the only real challenger to Hollywood's dominance of the labor-intensive genre. But just as Japanese anime seemed to be threatening to loosen Pixar and Disney's grip on the popular imagination with the likes of the teen mega hit "Your Name" and a Nintendo Super Mario movie in the pipeline, long-running structural problems are in danger of sapping its rise.

holds. Miyazaki blazed an arthouse trail with such animated classics as the Oscar-winning "Spirited Away", "Howl's Moving Castle" and the fabulous "My Neighbour Totoro".

Creative burn-out

But Yoshiaki Nishimura, a former Miyazaki stalwart who produced the Oscar-nominated "The Tale of The Princess Kaguya", told AFP that the industry was struggling to "face up to a lack of animators, bad working conditions and perhaps a lack of creativity". His peers also complain of low pay, a paucity of emerging young talent and burn-out in overworked animation teams who often put in 12- to 18-hour days. Rising star Keiichi Hara, who showed his new film "The Wonderland" at Annecy after winning the jury prize there four years ago with "Miss Hokusai", feared for the future.

"Perhaps the biggest problem in the Japanese animation industry is that there are no more young animators," he warned. Ayumu Watanabe—whose beautiful "The Children of the Sea" was shown out of competition at the festival—worried about visual "standardisation" and lack of originality, not helped by the fact that "fewer and fewer animators can draw well by hand."

Even industry heavyweights like Mamoru Hosoda, the genius behind "Wolf Children", "The Boy and the Beast" and "The Girl who Leapt Through Time", have to put in punishingly long hours with relatively tiny teams. He told AFP last year that his latest hit "Mirai" was inspired by his wife complaining that she was a widow to his work, calling him to account for leaving her "to bring up my son on her own".

'Your Name' follow-up

Watanabe said that the industry has split into two extremes: "Big productions who can call on an incredible number of animators and at the other end of the scale, and more artistic projects that have a lot less money." All eyes

later this year will be on the release of "Weathering with You", Makoto Shinkai's fantasy follow-up to the record-breaking "Your Name", now the highest-grossing Japanese film of all time.

Its production team unveiled a sneak preview of the supernatural story at Annecy, with a high-school runaway meeting a girl who can change the weather. With a live-action version of "Your Name" in the works and US television about to remake the cult Japanese series "Train Man" about an anime-obsessed youth, the genre has never been closer to the international mainstream. Nishimura said that he has tried to keep the "Ghibli style and spirit going... with a mix of hand-drawn and computer animation" at Studio Ponoc, which he set up after Miyazaki—a heavy smoker who was having health problems—first hung up his pencil in 2013.

New surfer story a hit

It scored its first hit in 2017 with "Mary and the Witch's Flower" and Nishimura premiered a series of new shorts at Annecy. For him, the industry's woes are "the result of an accumulation of problems over the last five to 10 years", but he insisted his studio was trying to "create a new environment". And as the wowed audiences at Annecy for Masaaki Yuasa's touching "Ride Your Wave" proved, despite its problems Japanese anime can still get things very right.

The story of love, surfing and grief struck a huge cord with critics at the French festival. Amel Lacombe, whose company Eurozoom is a key French animation distributor, said the industry's travails are due to its rapid growth, and now "we are in a period of adjustment". She believes that the Japanese authorities are waking up to anime's importance and global reach "as an export force". — AFP



People queue in the hall of Bonlieu during the International Animated Film Festival in Annecy, French Alps.

With talk of a talent shortage, its greatest star, the legendary Studio Ghibli founder Hayao Miyazaki, has come out of retirement at 78 to make "How Do You Live?"—which may be released next year—with speculation that he could take on another feature if his health



A person watches a Virtual Reality movie in Annecy during the Annecy International Animation Film Festival.



In this file photo US animator and director of "Playmobil le film" Lino Di Salvo, poses in Annecy at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival. — AFP photos