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Lessons of Risk Communication Regarding Remaining Sprayed Asbestos in Local Schools

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Abstract

In Tokyo's Nerima Ward, some 60,000 children go to 103 elementary and junior high schools. In 2003-2004, it was found that more than 50,000 square meters of sprayed asbestos remained in school buildings. The figure was almost equal to the amount found in 1987, when the whole nation was thrown into panic about deadly asbestos in school buildings. At that time, the Nerima Ward local government worked harder than other local governments to remove sprayed asbestos. The local government's facility management section and the educational board, teachers and local residents all thought that the asbestos danger was over. When it was clear the danger still existed, the local government asked itself two big questions. Why did such a large amount of sprayed asbestos remain in the school buildings? And how should the government tell school children, parents, teachers and local residents?

From the risk communication methods Nerima Ward adopted, we learned the following. 1) The local government lacked adequate information and knowledge about asbestos risks. This is partly because the central government failed to take adequate measures on environmental asbestos. 2) Problem solving comes from giving, not hiding, information. 3) We lack measures, skills and information to evaluate the risk of being exposed to asbestos in the environment.