

# Environmental Conservation of Lake Biwa



# Chapter 4 Introduction

## The “Soap Movement” and Environmental Conservation

**Keywords:** The Soap Movement, Lake Biwa Ordinance, Lake Biwa Day

### 1. The “Soap Movement” Organized by Prefectural Residents that Led to Establishment of the Lake Biwa Ordinance

From about 1970, cases of problems such as diaper rash in babies and eczema suffered by housewives began to appear, prompting debate throughout Shiga Prefecture as to whether or not such problems were being caused by synthetic detergents. Groups of housewives took the lead in launching study groups, movements such as cooperative purchasing of soap and other initiatives, and the cooperative purchase of soap became particularly widespread.

In the midst of these developments, a freshwater red tide caused by reddish brown plankton that released malodors occurred in Lake Biwa in May 1977. It was determined that one of the causes of this phenomenon was “phosphorous” contained, for example, in fertilizers and synthetic detergents widely used at the time. Spurred into action by the appearance of this red tide, prefectural residents united to form consumer groups and such other entities, and launched a movement to discontinue the use of detergents containing phosphorous and promote the use of soaps that contained natural oils as the main constituent. This was the so-called “Soap Movement.”

In the midst of the movement to encourage the use of soap powder to protect Lake Biwa, housewives took the lead in resolutely demanding the urgent implementation of measures by the prefectural government, and this led to the enforcement on July 1, 1980 of “the Ordinance for the Prevention of Eutrophication of Lake Biwa” (commonly known as the “Lake Biwa Ordinance”). It prohibited the sale,

use and exchange as gifts of household synthetic detergents containing phosphorous and regulated the discharge from factories of substances such as nitrogen and phosphorous.

The undertakings of the Soap Movement in Shiga Prefecture attracted attention nationwide and led to the removal of phosphorous from domestically-produced synthetic detergents and the appearance of phosphorous-free synthetic detergents.



**Fig. 4-1** The Soap Movement sought to eliminate synthetic detergents (1970's)



**Fig. 4-2** Enforcement of the Lake Biwa Ordinance (July 1, 1980)

## 2. “Lake Biwa Day”

With the aim of protecting Lake Biwa from imminent eutrophication, prefectural residents and the prefectural government joined forces to establish the Lake Biwa Ordinance and this event has become a milestone in the history of the environmental administration of the Shiga Prefectural Government. The following year, July 1, the day on which the Lake Biwa Ordinance was established, was officially named “Lake Biwa Day.”

Every year, Lake Biwa Day is marked by communal cleaning of Lake Biwa and has become a day that symbolizes the protection of Lake Biwa and a time for people to turn their thoughts to the lake.

## 3. The Spirit of the “Soap Movement” that Continues to this Day

While events such as the appearance of phosphorous-free synthetic detergents has led to a decline in the use of soap powder, the spirit of the “Soap Movement” of the

past, in other words, the determined resolution of the prefectural residents to hand down the beautiful Lake Biwa to the next generation, continues to this day.

According to a public opinion poll conducted by the prefectural government in 2012 on subjects such as the status of environmental education and the practice of environmental conservation by adults 20 years of age or older, 57% of respondents indicated that they were active in environmental conservation, demonstrating a high level of environmental awareness among the population of the prefecture.

With a background characterized by the nature of Lake Biwa passed down through the years and the high level of environmental awareness among the population of the prefecture, the initiatives described in this chapter have been implemented to preserve the quality of water to ensure safe usage.

(Environmental Policy Division,  
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**Fig. 4-3** 1st Anniversary of the enforcement of the Lake Biwa Ordinance (1981)



**Fig. 4-4** Communal cleaning on Lake Biwa Day