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 Ecosystem

Last Snowhouse Festival in Japanese City Set for 2010 Due to Lack of Snow



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It was recently announced that the Festival of the Largest Kamakura, an event that has been held every February 14th in the snowy city of Takayama, Gifu Prefecture, Japan, would be discontinued. Its 20th, to be held in 2010, will be the last one. The *kamakura*, an igloo-like snowhouse, is a traditional part of the scenery in this area of heavy snows in Japan. Lack of sufficient snowfall, however, most likely due to global warming, is the reason for canceling the festival.

Its main attraction is an oversized kamakura, which measures 20 meters in diameter and 10 meters in height. Though it is made out of snow, one feels warm inside the room. During the festival, the kamakura served as a planetarium projecting 2,700 stars for visitors to marvel at.

The oversized kamakura requires approximately 300 truckloads of snow to build. Snow starts to fall in late December in this region, and the kamakura is usually built with snow that is plowed off of parking lots and removed from roofs. The declining amount of snowfall in recent years, however, hindered the festival in 2008. In 2009, the city was forced to collect approximately 100 truckloads of additional snow from nearby areas and to reduce the height of the kamakura one meter lower than usual.

The high temperature in the city of Takayama on the day of the festival was 15.3 degrees Celsius in 2009, more than 10 degrees Celsius higher than the past average high of 3.7 degrees Celsius which made the kamakura a place one could actually experience the winter cold. "Unfortunately, we have no choice but to cancel the

festival," the organizer commented. "Hopefully, the Japanese government will leverage our advanced technology to implement more initiatives to fight global warming."

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