

BEWARE

A Bi-monthly Newsletter of CUTS Safety Watch

No. 1/2005



Playing a Good Samaritan!

It is worth helping out a road accident victim to give one a certain sense of accomplishment and peace of mind. Every year Road Safety Week is celebrated to make society aware about road safety and reaffirm our own responsibility. However, in spite of our best efforts, road accidents are common in India. It is found that every 12 minutes an Indian dies on the road and ten times that number get injured.

That a majority of accident victims are found to succumb in the absence of prompt medical assistance, is a fact we tend to overlook. It is really hard to believe that people who are otherwise rational and caring do not always come forward to assist victims of road accidents. Go to hospitals, there are umpteen cases where the victim is not given prompt medical attention. But why is this so?

Over the years people have hesitated to involve themselves with helping people in peril, for fear of

being sued. The fear of police harassment often plays strongly in the minds of bystanders preventing them from helping a road accident victim. Truth to tell, this perception is not wholly without basis. It is even more



detrimental when doctors and medical institutions, wait for police investigations to be over before the patient is treated.

The question is, how should society move against this. Let's first consider the legal provisions. In the case of Pt Paramanand Katara vs Union of India in 1989, the Supreme Court observed that treatment of the accident victim should not wait for the

arrival of the police and completion of legalities. Failure on the part of any govt hospital to attend to such patients is a violation of "Right to Life" guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution.

Moreover, in 1994, Section 134 was added to the Motor Vehicles Act 1988 (MVA) to cover the exigency of prompt medical attention to be given by medical institutions or doctors to accident victims without waiting for procedural formalities and fear of police harassment. Significantly, failure in this regard is punishable under Section 187 of MVA.

CUTS Safety Watch has taken up a campaign to popularise the idea of being Good Samaritans based on the above facts. It has successfully brought relevant government departments, police departments, media and civil society organisations in the loop to strengthen the movement. The Film/TV industry often helps build misconception and thus is the next target of the CUTS

Around the World

Good Samaritan Law is a legal principle that indemnifies a 'rescuer' who has voluntarily helped a victim in distress from being sued for 'wrongdoing'. Its purpose is to keep people from being reluctant to help a stranger in need for fear of legal repercussions in the event that they made some mistake while rendering assistance.

- Some of Canada's provinces that have passed Good Samaritan Laws are:
 - Ontario - Good Samaritan Act
 - Alberta - Emergency Medical Aid Act
 - British Columbia - Good Samaritan Act
 - Nova Scotia - Volunteer Services Act
- Over a dozen European Countries including France and Germany have duty-to-rescue laws.

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CUTS
International

Consumer Unity & Trust Society

Email: cuts@vsnl.com /
cuts-calcutta@cuts-international.org
Website: www.cuts.org

Subscription Rs. 50 per annum

Unborn Children at Cancer Risk

Cancer in children may be induced in a much earlier stage than previously thought - in fact while the child is still in the mother's womb.



According to British researcher George Knox, exposure in the womb to environmental and industrial pollutants inhaled by the mother could lead to cancer for the babies.

The dangerous pollutants mentioned in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health include particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, benzene, benz(a)pyrene and dioxins. Polluted air inhaled by the mother can also lead to DNA damage in the unborn child. These findings may help in the development of new methods to prevent certain cancers.

(ET, 17.01.05 & ToI, 17.02.05)

A Silent Humanitarian Crisis

Dr. Jamie Bartram of the World Health Organisation (WHO) has called for immediate efforts to tackle the lack of sanitation coverage in

developing countries. Sanitation facilities are hardly able to keep pace with the growing population in these parts of the world.

According to health experts, 4000 children die from lack of clean drinking water and sanitation every day. Water related diseases like malaria, diarrhoea and trachoma are rampant in the developing countries.

To tackle the problem, the link between safety and development has to be realized. For instance, when building a reservoir or irrigation scheme, care has to be taken that water does not stagnate. It is only through an integrated effort that the problem can be addressed.

(RH, 25.02.05)

Nimesulide Given Clean Chit

A study conducted by Kolkata, India, based International Medical Research Organisation (IMRO) has concluded that nimesulide is a safe and effective drug in the treatment of children. The drug is used to treat



fever and inflammatory conditions in children. However, nimesulide is yet to receive any regulatory approval from the US Food & Drug Administration. The drug however is available in a number of European countries.

According to Dr. A Swain at the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Institute of Paediatrics, the drug is safe for children as long as people stick to the prescribed dosage. Around two years back the controversy around nimesulide erupted when some side effects were reported in children.

(BL, 11.01.05)

Bird Flu Alert

The next global pandemic may well be caused by avian flu, according to scientists. Even as more research is required to confirm whether the virus, which led to the death of tens of millions of birds, poses a pandemic threat to human life, avian flu has already claimed 46 lives in Asia.

WHO fears bird flu may get deadlier if it mutates into a form that could be easily transmitted between humans. The virus has been checked to a certain extent; however it is still at large amongst poultry, ducks and wildlife. Countries have started stockpiling on vaccine doses.

(TT, 24.02.05; fao.com, 25.02.05)



Health Updates

Cheer For Tea!

Chamomile tea has been found to protect the body from colds as well as menstrual cramps. Chamomile is a medicinal herb with apple like aroma and flavour. On testing, researchers found a component that helps the body fight colds. They also found a higher level of glycine, which can relieve muscle cramps.

(ToI, 19.01.05)



A Mediterranean Cure

Oleic acid, the main component of olive oil has been identified as an effective shield for women against breast cancer. According to Researcher, Javier Menendez, of Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago, oleic acid dilutes the action of an oncogene. It also boosts the performance of Herceptin, which is a breast cancer drug. The finding will help doctors understand why women who live on a rich Mediterranean diet (with olive oil as its main component) are better protected against breast cancer.



(ToI, 11.01.05)

Headache Leads to Heartache!

People suffering from migraines along with vision problems (spots, lines, aura, blackouts) are almost twice likely to suffer from an early stroke according to a study published in the science journal Neurology. 24-32 million Americans suffer from migraines. The findings would help to understand the link between

Cold Cure May Trigger Stroke

Some pills and syrups taken to deal with the common cold like D Cold, Vicks Action 500 or Coldarin have been found to contain phenyl-propanolamine (PPA) that can lead to strokes. Dr. K Srinath Reddy of All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) says that doctors continue to prescribe these medicines even after safer alternatives are present. It is difficult to ever ascertain how many people suffer strokes as a result of cold

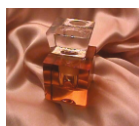


Fire Fighting Committee

Airport Authority of India (AAI) has come up with a strict set of guidelines relating to fire safety after a fire broke out at the Bangalore airport. A high-level enquiry committee has been constituted which would be led by an officer of the level of Executive Director. The safety measures will be for various operational agencies functioning from sensitive terminals. Ramalingam, AAI Chairman, said that a time frame would be fixed for the safety committee to submit its findings which would hold for all the airports in the country. The move is a step in the right direction since fire safety regulations do not get the deserved amount of attention in this country.



(TH, 02.02.05)



Toxic Perfumes!

The cost to health of smelling good has just gone up. On Valentines Day, the busiest time in the perfume business, two environmental groups have sent out warnings about high levels of toxic ingredients in perfumes.

The study, commissioned by Greenpeace and conducted by the Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research, found harmful phthalates and artificial musks in almost all the brands. The body easily absorbs one of the identified phthalates and separate studies have indicated that it could damage sperm and lead to breathing trouble.

The perfume industry has however dismissed the report saying that their products underwent strict checks and would be withdrawn if found harmful.

(ET, 14.02.05)

Test For Lead Content

The US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) has announced a policy on the amount of permissible lead content in children's metal jewellery. The policy

will provide guidance to manufacturers, importers and retailers.

CPSC has also prepared laboratory procedures to carry out the tests for lead in the pieces of jewellery. The level of lead should not be more than 600 parts per million (ppm). If on initial testing the level is greater than 600 ppm further testing will be done using acid extraction. Any level greater than 600 ppm causes high blood pressure levels in children. Lead poisoning also leads to behavioral problems, learning disabilities, hearing problems and growth retardation.



(Cpsc.gov, 03.02.05)

LPG Safety Camp at Goa

An extremely novel method of spreading awareness about LPG safety was demonstrated in Aldona, Goa. The Aldona Civic and Consumer Forum in collaboration with M/s Kavlekar Gas Service, Saligao and Quitula Sports Club organised a camp with LPG safety as the point of focus. The camp was for the benefit of LPG consumers of Hindustan Petroleum. The camp and Gas Mela was to enlighten people on the safe use of LPG cylinders.

Demonstrations

and instructions were given on how to fit the gas regulator, detecting gas leakages, changing the rubber tube, insurance covers and mechanical checks by authorised person, was provided.

(goacan.org, 02.02.05)



Cosmetics Made Safe

L'oreal, Revlon and Unilever have confirmed that they have eliminated toxic chemicals from their products in compliance with European Safety Standards. EU law mandates that cosmetic companies stop using chemicals that are suspected of causing cancer, damaged fertility or birth defects.

The companies differ on their reformulation policies which may be global or follow a market-to-market approach. Unilever is still unclear on its reformulation policy. The announcements made by the companies follow a number of requests by the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics (a coalition of health and environment groups) to stop using chemicals that are carcinogens, mutagens or reproductive toxins.

(breastcancerfund.org, 13.01.05)

Products Recalled

In the biggest recall in UK, 359 products contaminated with the carcinogenic dye Sudan 1 has been recalled. Sudan 1, a red dye, was found to have contaminated a batch of chilli powder which was shipped to US, Canada, Europe and the Caribbean and used in subsequent food products. It is banned across the EU. However, The Food Standards Agency has announced that there is no immediate risk to health.



(FT, 22.02.05 & earthtimes.org, 19.02.05)



Whirlpool has recalled 162,000 dishwashers due to a wiring defect which causes overheating and may result in fire; according to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. The defect lay in the wash motor wiring of the dishwashers, which were sold throughout the US from June 2004 to January 2005.

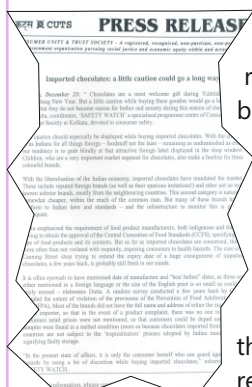
(WTNH.com, 26.02.05)

The US Consumer Product Safety Commission has announced the recall of 32,000 units of Playtex Hip Hammock manufactured by Playtex Products Inc. It is used to carry babies and the defect lay in the shoulder strap, which could detach. The company received two complaints although no incidence of an



Safety Watch in Action

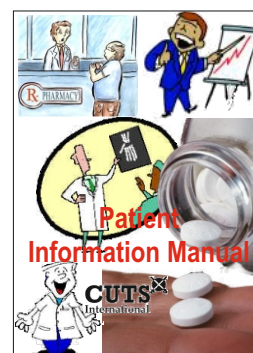
Chocolate Safety



Even chocolates are not safe anymore. Reputed foreign brands (as well as their cheap imitations) and inferior brands, especially from the neighbouring countries are found in roadside stalls. The second category is easily within the reach of the common man but these brands hardly conform to Indian laws and standards. On top of that, there is no infrastructure to monitor this. It is mandatory for both indigenous and foreign food product manufacturers to obtain the approval of the Central Committee of Food Standards, but as far as imported chocolates are concerned, this is violated more often than not. This exposes consumers to health hazards. The dates of manufacture and expiry are often mentioned in foreign languages, which are not comprehensible by the average Indian. A random survey conducted by CUTS a few years back revealed that most brands did not have the full name and address of the manufacturer so that in the event of a complaint there was no one to approach. Maximum retail prices were not mentioned as well which meant that anything could be charged from the

Rational Use of Drugs

CUTS-Calcutta Resource Centre at present is undertaking a project in association with WHO and the Drug Controller General (India) office on Consumer Awareness on Rational Use of Drugs (RUD). The project aims to highlight issues that a patient as a consumer needs to be aware of for rational drug use. This is a nationwide initiative to spread awareness and launched in nine states in India. As part of the project, a Patient Information Manual will be prepared, that will list the dos and don'ts for a consumer. This information includes what a patient needs to find out from his doctor regarding drugs prescribed - when to take them, for how long, whether any food/drug restriction is to be followed etc, what a patient needs to check for before purchasing drugs, storage of drugs, ill effects of OTC drugs and specific



Feedback

BEWARE

Kerala Consumer Service Society
Kerala, India

Excellent Material

We sincerely thank you for forwarding BEWARE - newsletter No. 1 and the copy of "How to Survive as a Consumer".

We thank you very much for your prompt attention in this regard. Best use will be made of this excellent material.

General Secretary,
Akhil Bharatiya Grahak Panchayat,
Mysore - 8

Creation of Safety Consciousness

We are happy to associate with your centre - Safety Watch. Road and rail safety issues are the need of the hour. Please be kind enough to send us issues 1-6/2004 of BEWARE. We wish that BEWARE will be able to create safety consciousness leading to reduced occurrence of avoidable accidents.

We also understand that your series on Deadly Profits is on the anvil. Kindly include our name in the mailing list for Deadly Profits.

Dr. T Balachandran

Request for Newsletter

Thanks for the requested book. Please see if various newsletters of CUTS can be provided to us regularly.

P Bhakat, Charter Secretary
Rotary Club of Jhargram Green,
Jhargram, W.B.

Is It Really Safe?

Valuable and Informative

The book 'Is It Really Safe?' is a very valuable informative book for the consumers and NGOs for increasing awareness of the consumer. It reflects your sincere and constant endeavor to explore the different safety aspects of our daily life.

Poor attitude of the implementing authority of the laws relating to safety and the lack of awareness of the consumers as pointed by you will definitely urge the consumer organisations to react on these.

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SOURCES

RH: Reuters Health, TH: The Hindu, ToI: Times of India, TT: The Telegraph, BL: Business Line, ET: Economic Times, FT: FinancialTimes.

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