

BEWARE

A Bi-monthly newsletter of CUTS Safety Watch

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World Health Day: "Road Safety is No Accident"

As in other years, the World Health Organisation (WHO) celebrated World Health Day (WHD) on April 7, 2004, this year's theme being "Road Safety is No Accident". The theme is an interesting play on words that draws our attention to a very important truth: road safety does not happen by chance and a planned, deliberate, and concerted approach is necessary to enhance safety on our roads. And, with nearly 1.2mn deaths and over 20mn injured in road accidents every year the world over, it comes not a day too soon.

Of particular concern to us in the Third World is that over 75 percent of these casualties occur in developing countries and countries in transition, although these countries account for only 32 percent of all motor vehicles. Moreover, if current trends continue, the number of people killed or injured on the world's roads will rise by more than 60 percent between 2000 and 2020, most of them being in the developing countries.

The loss and suffering associated with road accidents are preventable. A wide range of effective interventions exists, and experience in countries with long histories of motorised travel has shown that a scientific, "systems approach" to road safety is essential to tackling the problem. This approach addresses the traffic system as a whole and looks at the interactions between vehicles,



road users and the road infrastructure to identify solutions. Obviously, there is no single blueprint for road safety.

On April 7, WHO and the World Bank have launched the "World report on road traffic injury prevention" which presents current knowledge on the subject and offers scientific evidence and solutions. WHO and partners have also launched a one-year global road safety campaign, which aims to promote action to prevent road accidents.

This piece will not be complete without touching on another, though related, issue which is so important in the Indian context. That is, giving succor to road accident victims especially during the 'golden hour' following an accident. It goes without saying that **prompt** medical attention can save lives. The law in India lays great emphasis on this aspect, enjoining drivers and doctors to render help without waiting for legal formalities to be completed. The bystander, though not covered under the Motor Vehicles Act 1988, surely also has a moral responsibility as a conscientious citizen especially in hit and run cases. Yet, we are surprisingly reticent when it comes to actually helping someone in distress. A change in the perception of the common man towards the law enforcing agencies would arguably go a long way to rectify this attitude.

Celebration of World Health Day Around the World

◆ **United Kingdom** – Department for Transport, UK organised a high level conference where a World Road Safety Network was launched with an agenda to highlight the global road safety challenge and to remind people that road safety is everyone's responsibility and requires action at a number of levels: global, national, local and individual.

◆ **USA** - Pan American Health Organisations issued a report on traffic safety in Washington and launched a campaign to reduce deaths and injuries from road crashes throughout America.

◆ **Switzerland** - The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Transport Division works actively with member governments, other international organisations and NGOs, to reduce the number and gravity of road collisions. Concurrent to WHD events, 5-11 April 2004 marked the 4th Road Safety Week in the UNECE Region.

◆ **Pakistan** - The Head Injury Society (Karachi

Chapter) and the Citizen Police Liaison Committee hosted a seminar in Karachi to raise public awareness for road safety crises on the roads and for the urgent need of road traffic injury prevention.

◆ **Nepal** - The Nepal Pharmacy Students' Association distributed a list of drugs that cause impaired driving, to all hospitals and dispensaries in the region.

◆ **Nigeria** - Road Traffic Safety Network, Nigeria, organised a panel discussion on road safety paying special attention to cyclist road safety and a road safety seminar for employers in transportation.

◆ **Argentina** - Luchemos por la Vida, a road traffic injury prevention organisation of Argentina, celebrated WHD by broadcasting television and radio spots on speeding and impaired driving, sending open letters to the main Argentinean newspapers, presenting a video on road safety for vehicle drivers.

IN THIS ISSUE

All that is Sweet
is Not Honey2

Toys Recalled During
March-April 20042

Government Bans
Tobacco Ads3

Beauty Industry's
Ugly Secret3



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New Food Safety System

The Ontario Government has introduced a new food safety system - Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP), for small and medium-sized food processing plants. HACCP is a food safety system that focuses on identifying and preventing problems from occurring during food processing.

HACCP was originally designed in the 1960s to help ensure microbiological safety of food for National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) astronauts. HACCP has evolved to address chemical and physical hazards and is recognised worldwide as the leading means of maximising food safety throughout the food chain. The HACCP Advantage does not replace traditional food inspection methods - it complements them.

(CN, 08.03.04)

Effect of Pesticides Exposure

A study titled 'Arrested development' by the environmental group Greenpeace, India, stated that children constantly exposed to pesticides are affected by serious mental development disorders. The report reveals that children living in villages exposed to dangerously high levels of pesticides have poor memories and impaired analytical and motor skills.



Greenpeace drew these conclusions after studying the impact of pesticides on 898 children between the ages of four and thirteen in 18 villages in six states.

In the light of these findings, the organisation has demanded that the Government should adopt a rational pesticide policy and ban all pesticides, starting with those banned in other countries.

(HT, 10.04.04)

All that is Sweet is Not Honey

Industry watchers have observed a sudden increase in honey imports from China, Nepal and the US. Over the past three years Nepal has exported a huge amount of honey to India, despite having no base to produce such a large quantity. This triggered off apprehensions that the country was being used as a dumping ground for sub-standard honey with an eye on the Indian market, at a time when Chinese honey was being rejected in the West on account of high antibiotic residue or an unhealthy dose of pesticides.



Agro-industry watchers have asked government to tighten the Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary Rules for food products and rework the quality standards to make antibiotic and pesticide testing in the product mandatory, both domestically and internationally.

With honey figuring so high on the breakfast menu of children, the government is under intense pressure to make contaminant-testing standards for honey as tight as that for infant foods; and review honey standards under Prevention of Food Adulteration Act (PFA) and Agmark with immediate effect.

(ET, 10.04.04)

Rides of Death

Two out of three amusement rides at Queensland Shows, Australia, have failed safety checks. A State Government audit found only 86 rides out of 218 to be satisfactory, with many cracking apart and fitted with the wrong bolts. They also issued 106 specific improvement notices for rides with safety breaches - a dramatic rise from the previous year when only 37 significant problems were found.

For the sake of both the young employees and the park patrons, who are largely children themselves, the US Department of Labour recognised that operating roller coasters and thrill rides require split-second judgments that, if mishandled, can injure both the operator

and dozens of riders. A new bill has been introduced in the US House of Representatives, which would set the minimum age of 18 for amusement ride operators. As a result, minors would no longer be allowed to operate amusement rides at the nation's carnivals and amusement parks.

The Amusement Park Ride Child Labour Act of 2004 would require the Department of Labour to declare the operation of "power-driven" amusement rides "hazardous" under the Fair Labour Standards Act.

(SM, 21.03.04 & www.rideaccidents.com, 23.04.04)

Toxic Disney Clothes

In a shocking discovery, tests carried out by Greenpeace have revealed that the children's wear from Disney in over 19 countries contain toxic chemicals that could cause reproductive and immune system disorders, hormone mimicking or even cancer. This has been published in a full-fledged "corporate crimes report" called Toxic Childrenswear by Disney. The international campaigners have said the chemicals were mostly found in clothing with plastic prints using Poly Vinyl Chloride (PVC).



(AA, 19.04.04)

Thatched Roofs under Study

The Government of Tamil Nadu is examining the possibility of banning thatched roofs in marriage halls in the wake of the recent fire disaster in Srirangam which claimed 64 lives and another in Tuticorin, in which fortunately there were no casualties because of generous escape avenues. If thatched roofs are totally unavoidable due to ritualistic reasons, the plaited coconut leaves are to be treated with a fire retardant solution.

In general, the Fire and Rescue Department has begun to critically examine all marriage halls. The Divisional Fire Officers have been instructed to insist on owners to prominently put up boards containing details of the fire service licence issued, including the conditions imposed for fire safety measures. The Department feels that side by side creating awareness among the users of the marriage halls, is equally important.

(TH, 03.03.04)

Toys Recalled During March - April, 2004 in US in Cooperation with the US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)

Babies "R" Us of Wayne, New Jersey, voluntarily recalled Snail Push Toys. The screw securing the toy handle to the push toy could detach, posing a choking hazard.

FAO Schwarz Inc., King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, voluntarily recalled 323 Fire Engine Pull-Along Toys. Small parts could detach from the toy, posing a choking hazard to small children.

Brand Imports LLC, Scottsdale, Arizona, voluntarily recalled about one million Children's Rings. The rings contain high levels of lead, posing a risk of lead poisoning to young children.

www.cpsc.gov



Government Bans Tobacco Ads

There is rejoicing in the anti-tobacco lobby: the government has banned the advertising of tobacco products, smoking in public places and selling to minors. But this issue has stoked the old debate about how far this step will be effective in actually curbing tobacco consumption. For one, the tobacco industry would find ways and means to get around the ban even on surrogate advertising, feels at least one knowledgeable expert. For another, there is a huge market - predominantly rural, for *beedis*. *Beedi* manufacturers, in any case, had hardly depend on media advertisements to boost their sales and the ban is unlikely to affect them substantially. The answer then lies in increasing awareness among the people on the hazards of tobacco consumption.

(TOI, 24.04.04 & ET, 26.04.04)



Donor Battles for Life

A heart-wrenching piece of news comes from Madurai. Sekar, a 27 year 'donated' blood for a living - at least 25 times in the past two years, which is more than four times the medically allowed figure for healthy people. A few private blood banks accepted donations whenever "this regular customer" approached, and did not raise objections. The net result of this mode of living is that he is now battling for his life in a Madurai hospital. Being anaemic and underweight, he is making slow and difficult recovery. Blood donation saves lives, but for Sekar the cause almost 'cost' him his life.

(TH, 03.04.04)

Side Air Bags to Protect the Head

Every year, 3.18mn US vehicles experience side-impact collisions. These types of crashes are riskier for riders than front or rear collisions, because car sides crumple less and absorb less energy from the impact. Side air bags are incorporated in vehicles to protect the riders. But they would be even more effective if they were designed to protect the head also, in addition to the torso.

A study, by Dr. Elisa R. Braver et al., based at the University of Maryland School of Medicine in Baltimore, USA, reviewed crash data between 1999

and 2001. Their findings provide compelling evidence that side air bags which include head protection substantially reduce the risk of deaths in side impacts, which account for about 9,400 deaths a year in the US.

(TOI, 22.03.04)

Barcode Systems for Safe Healthcare

The ordinary barcode may become very handy in the near future in the endeavour to provide error-free and safer healthcare. European Article Numbering (EAN) India, a non-profit organisation promoted by industry and the Union Commerce Ministry, is advancing the use of barcode systems in the healthcare sector in India.

Using the EAN barcode systems, hospital staff can access accurate data of stock status, expiry date of drugs, patients' records and inventories of laboratory samples and minimise the chance of patients given wrong medication. Barcoding can also reduce the risk of fatal human errors in blood banks.

(TH, 11.03.04)

Fizzy Drinks Slapped Another Charge

The fizzy drink is certainly a fall guy in the beverages kingdom. Adding to a litany of charges against them, is a fresh charge that the acidic content in it causes dental erosion. Mind you, the charge of causing tooth decay - the sugar in the drink causes it - is old hat. In a British study, it was found that the acid in the fizzy drink is by far the biggest factor in eroding the enamel protective coating of the teeth and can cause thinning or chipping of tooth edges.

(TOI, 13.03.04)

Beauty Industry's Ugly Secret

Here are some deadly facts about the popular cosmetics used for



increasing natural beauty. A compound in cosmetics products, phthalates has been banned by the European Union for its links to cancer and fatal deformities. US health advocates are pushing for a similar ban.

In May 2002, the Environmental Working Group, a Washington-based organisation, tested 72 cosmetics and found phthalates in three-quarters of them. Though the levels were minimal, scientists warned that their combined effect could pose health problems. People need to know that some cosmetics contain toxic chemicals where safer ingredients need to be used.

While sunscreen use seems like an obvious way to protect against squamous cell carcinoma, a treatable form of skin cancer, studies have found that their use is associated with a substantially increased risk of malignant melanoma. Sunscreen use may reduce synthesis of vitamin D which exerts a broadly anti-cancer effect.

WN, 30.04.04

Recent Developments on Indian Railway Safety

Mumbai High Court to Appoint Committee

The Mumbai High Court has declared that it would appoint an expert committee to look into the causes of serious and fatal accidents along suburban railway tracks and to recommend measures to provide immediate medical assistance to victims.

(TOI, 08.04.04)

Technology Mission Set up

Mr. R. K. Singh, Chairman, Railway Board has announced the setting up of a technology mission for rail safety in collaboration with the Ministries of Science & Technology and Human Resource Development as well as the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur. The mission will address all aspects of rail safety especially those relating to collisions, derailments, rolling stock, and improvement in human resource by way of enhancing motivational factors and life cycle cost.

(FE, 25.03.04)

Fire Retardant Coaches

Integrated Coach Factory (ICF), Perambur has developed state-of-the-art fire resistant coaches now being run on Southern Railway on an experimental basis. The coaches are built with less inflammable materials such as fibre reinforced plastic module and will have fire/smoke alarms.



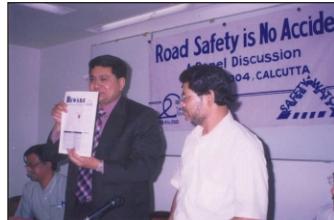
(TH, 27.04.04)

Safety Watch Activity

Panel Discussion on Road Safety

One needs to take care of his own while on the road, irrespective of whether he is a pedestrian or a driver. This was the main idea that emerged at the panel discussion titled "Road Safety is No Accident" organised by **CUTS, Safety Watch** on April 7 at Calcutta. The panel discussion brought together representatives of consumer organisations, experts on road safety issues, common people, schools and media to discuss in detail about the road safety scenario in the country.

An eminent personality, Mr. Sanjay Budhia, Chairman, Eastern Region, Confederation of Indian Industries (CII), launched "Beware", a CUTS initiative to disseminate information and empower people on different consumer safety issues.



Book Release

The book "Is It Really Safe?" written by Soumi Home Roy of Safety Watch was released by Shri Navin Chawla, Secretary, Department of Consumer Affairs, Govt. of India on March 12 at the India International Centre in New Delhi.

Shri Chawla praised CUTS and congratulated for bringing out the same as a compendium of various articles written from



time to time on consumer safety issues. He also mentioned that the book should be translated into the vernaculars and made available to different States who could pay for the translation and printing in the vernacular. He also suggested CUTS to take steps to have Hindi copies placed with every government school in Delhi.

Prof. Dinesh Mohan of IIT, Delhi, as Chief Guest, praised CUTS for being the only civil society organisation, to his knowledge, which was working on vital safety issues.

Feedback

Is It Really Safe?

Source of Information

This is regarding the publication of the book "Is It Really Safe?". Kindly accept our heartiest congratulation on your achievement. Articles are quite informative and we even intend to include it in our quarterly publication of CNW magazine.

*Vijay Luxhmi S. Shukla
Executive Assistant
Consumer Coordination Council
New Delhi, India*

Congratulation

Many congratulations for successful publication of book. It is so nicely gathered. We will really appreciate if you send one or two extra copies of it for INCf.

*Abhishek Srivastava
Secretary General
Indian National Consumers' Federation,
Lucknow, UP, India*

Worthy to Translate in Vernacular

'Is It Really Safe?' is an excellent booklet. It would be a great help for local consumer organisations if the book could be translated in Hindi and Urdu.

*P. Bhattacharya
Principal Secretary
Consumer Affairs Department
Government of West Bengal*

Appreciation of Our Publications

CUTS has been so committed to send me newsletters and publications that I have received with great interest. I have also been sharing these with other colleagues who have enjoyed these readings with great deal of respect for what CUTS is doing in India!

*Arjumand Nizami
Delegate Intercooperation
National Programme Officer,
NRM Programme
Swiss Agency for Development and
Cooperation
Peshwar, Pakistan*

Press Release on Toy Safety

CUTS issued a press release on toy safety narrating different hazards related to toys with a request to parents/doctors to report any accident/injury to their children/patients while playing with toys to CUTS. The idea was to document such cases and then lobby with the Ministry of Consumer Affairs to make the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) standards mandatory for domestic manufacturers. The press release was covered in The Times of India, The Hindustan Times, Business Standard, Dainik Vishwamitra in Calcutta, The Hindu in Delhi, Dainik Bhaskar and Rajasthan Patrika in Jaipur.



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