

# BEWARE

A Bi-monthly Newsletter of CUTS Safety Watch

No. 2/2005

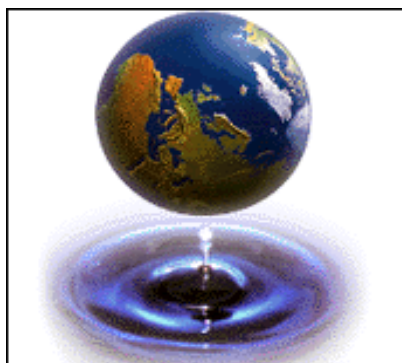


## “Water for Life” Decade

AS every year, March 22 this year was celebrated as 'World Water Day'. It also ushered in the United Nations (UN) sponsored decade 'Water for Life 2005-2015'. The UN has adopted the very welcome strategy of dedicating certain periods from time to time to certain issues, in order that world attention is focused on the problem, to effect a quantum jump in alleviation. For example, the first water decade from 1981 to 1990 brought water to over a billion people across the world and sanitation to almost 770mn. Much more still needs to be done. Safe water supply and adequate sanitation to protect health are among the basic human rights. Today, there are still almost 1.1 billion people world-wide who have inadequate access to water and 2.4bn without appropriate sanitation. Together, these shortcomings spawn waterborne

diseases that kill more than six million children every year on an average (about 20,000 children a day!)

Looking at the scenario in India, it is evident that water pollution is



almost endemic in this country. The most polluting of sources are the city sewage and industrial waste discharged into the rivers. Presently, only about ten percent of the wastewater generated is treated in India; the rest is discharged as it is into our water bodies. Such water,

which ultimately ends up in our households, is often highly contaminated and carries disease-causing microbes. Agricultural runoff is another major water pollutant as it contains fertilizers and pesticides. Regrettably, in India we have the added problem of natural pollutants like arsenic that have serious toxic effects on humans and are quite difficult to eliminate.

Water-borne epidemics and health hazards in the aquatic environment are mainly due to improper management of water resources. In order to prevent the spread of water-borne infectious diseases, people should take adequate precautions. The city water supply should be properly checked and necessary steps taken to disinfect it. Water pipes should be regularly checked for leaks and cracks. Effluent must be treated before discharge. At home, the water should be boiled, filtered, or other

### Around the World

People around the globe celebrated the occasion of World Water Day through various programmes and activities. Below are some such events:

- Canada - Hamilton's World Water Day Walkathon, on March 22, Hamilton
- India - One day programme on 'Jal Hi Jeevan Hai' on March 22, Lucknow
- Japan - Film show and discussion on Water Harvesting on March 22, Tokyo
- Nepal - School debate on 'Water for Life' on March 22, Nepalgunj
- Netherlands - Debate on the 'Future of Water' on March 30, Amsterdam
- South Africa - National Water Week, on March 21-27.
- United Kingdom - Conference on 'Water for Life' on March 22, at London

Over the years World Water Day has been celebrated on March 22, 2005, each time embracing different themes highlighting the many aspects of this invaluable resource.

- 2005 - Water for Life Decade
- 2002 - Water for Development

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International

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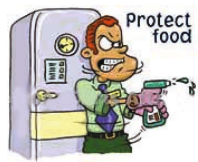
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## Product Punch

### China Focuses on Toxic Food

As the rest of the world worries about fake goods flooding their markets, China has turned the spotlight on fake and toxic food that is fast becoming a serious public health issue.



Incidents like the death of 12 babies from sub-standard milk powder, reports of rice wine spiked with industrial methanol, toxic ice tea and soy sauce made from human hair have put pressure on the Government. Food safety standards seem to have deteriorated and food legislation in China continues to be ineffective. Penalties are also too lenient to counter the lure of illegal gains.

Following a seven-month food safety campaign, a crackdown on fake food and pharmaceuticals was conducted. China has also announced the creation of a grading and public supervision system by 2008.

(FT, 27.04.05)

### Baby Oil Controversy

It all started with the Maharashtra Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issuing a notice to Johnson & Johnson

(J&J) for its baby product - Johnson's Baby Oil. The FDA claimed that it was a case of misbranding since there had been no clinical trial to brand the product a special baby product. The FDA also contended that the oils contain liquid paraffin which is unfit for babies. Starting with J&J, three other companies, Himalaya Drug Co., Emami and Wipro have also been issued notices.

While the companies insist that their products are launched only after extensive dermal toxicity and safety trials, Dr. R.K Anand, Head of Paediatrics Department at Mumbai's Jaslok Hospital said that he has often treated children with rashes caused by baby specific oils and soap. Dr. Raju Shah, Head of the Indian Academy of Paediatricians, however claimed that liquid paraffin was used globally in baby oils. As the debate continues, parents sink deeper into confusion.

(ET, 16 & 23.03.05 & BL, 07.04.05)



### Safe Colours of Joy

The National Botanical Research Institute (NBRI) has introduced herbal gulal which is not harmful but beneficial for the skin. Developed a

couple of years back, it underwent repackaging recently to make it commercially viable. It is a safe substitute for the bright colours available in the market which cause skin and eye allergies and are carcinogenic as well.

Available in four colours; sandalwood (orange), jasmine (yellow), khas (green) and rose (pink), the floral and herbal extracts act as antioxidants which is good for the skin. These colours are not fast and bright, as they do not contain any hard salts like lead, chromium or nickel. The cost comes to about Rs 20 per 100gm and is fast gaining popularity amongst students and the elderly.

(ToI, 20.03.05)



### Thumbs Down (due) to Mobiles

Mobile phones have long been controversial over safety concerns due to the radiations emitted by them. In a new development, excessive messaging or gaming on the tiny keypads of the phones is leading to aching thumbs accompanied by weakness and numbness of the wrists. The condition is known as 'Trigger Thumb' - an inflammation or irritation of the tendons. The risk of developing this condition is higher amongst young people as their cartilage is softer.

Doctors advise a break from the gadget as the best remedy. Instances such as these remind us of the negative effects that technology brings with it.

(ToI, 31.03.05)



## Warnings And Recalls

### Ranbaxy Withdraws Arthritis Drug

The US FDA had asked Pfizer to suspend the sale of Bextra (Valdecoxib)- a drug prescribed for arthritis in April. The FDA contended that the drug could lead to an increased cardiovascular risk as well as serious skin reactions.



Following the above directive, Ranbaxy Laboratories Limited has voluntarily withdrawn all Valdecoxib formulations from the Indian market. In a press release Ranbaxy asked all patients who were on Valdecoxib to consult their doctors for alternative medication.

(Insight, March-April, 2005)

### Vacuum Cleaners Recalled

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, in cooperation with the Hoover Co., of North Canton, Ohio. (Hoover Co. is part of the Maytag Corp.), have announced a voluntary recall of about 636,000 Hoover Self-Propelled Upright Vacuum Cleaners. The recalled vacuums have defective on-off switches that can overheat the handle and tool holder areas of the vacuum, resulting in a fire hazard.



(CBC News)



### Mushroom Warning

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and Les Aliments Valli Foods Inc. are warning the public not to consume Valli brand 'Assorted Mushrooms In Oil' because the product

### Canada Report on Pesticides

The College of Family Physicians of Ontario released a comprehensive report on pesticide exposure and health risk. The report, that various pesticides caused adverse health effects, made headlines all over North America. Many municipalities in Canada, including Quebec have introduced bans on the indiscriminate use of pesticides.



## Crashworthy Test



On March 29, Research Designs and Standards Organisation (RDSO), an arm of the Indian Railways, successfully conducted a full-scale actual crashworthy test for the first time in the country for a passenger train coach. "Crashworthy coaches" are specially designed to ensure minimum injuries to passengers in case of a crash.

The first test, which was designed as a collision between a "crashworthy coach" and a wagon, filled with concrete (to get the effect of a collision wall) produced positive results. The coach crashed at those areas where damage to passengers would be minimised. The second test is likely to be held in July. RDSO was the nodal testing body and US-based Transportation Technology Center Inc., which provides management and engineering support to the railway transportation industry across the world, provided the testing inputs.

(BL, 05.04.05)

## Towards a Smoke-Free Society

Ireland celebrated its first anniversary of banning smoking in pubs, restaurants and workplaces on March 29. Research for the Office of Tobacco Control concluded that 93 percent of the people feel that the ban was a good idea.

Violation of the ban can result in fines of up to 3000 euros and pubs risk losing their licences. Countries



like Norway, New Zealand, Malta & Italy have all followed Ireland and have gone tobacco-free.

Taking forward the movement, the World Health

Organisation's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), which came into force in end February 2005, bans direct advertising and sponsorship of cigarettes and the use of misleading adjectives like 'light' and 'low tar'. Visual warnings will now have to be

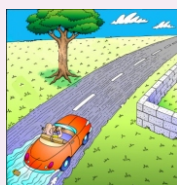
companies, Ford and General Motors. Petrochemical based plastics such as polyvinyl chloride release



toxic chemicals throughout their life cycle - during production, vehicle use as well as during vehicle incineration.

(DTE, 30.04.05)

## Inviting Comments on Road Safety Policy



Ministry of Shipping, Road Transport & Highways, Department of Road Transport & Highways have formulated a draft National Road Safety Policy in consultation with road safety experts and other departments. This was placed before the National Road Safety Council, an apex Body, constituted under the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988.

The draft policy has been posted on the Ministry's website and is open for comments/suggestions in hard copy or email till August 31, 2005.

Comments can be sent to the following addresses:

Shri A.P Bahadur, Chief Engineer,  
Email: cep3@nic.in, Ph: 011-23725478  
Shri Pankaj Agarwal, Executive Engineer,

carried on packs and sale around schools and to minors have been banned. FCTC is the first official global public health treaty. We hope that examples such as these will form a health legacy that can be handed down to future generations.

(ToI, 30.03.05 & DTE, 31.03.05)

## Plastic Fumes

According to Michigan based Ecology Centre and York based Clean Product Action, plastics used in cars emit toxic chemicals even after production, thereby exposing its users to health risks. They point out that unsafe plastics are used despite less toxic substitutes being available in the market. Plastics make up about 7.5 percent of a car's weight. The study graded top automakers according to their commitment to use environment friendly plastics. Japanese company Toyota fared better than the US

## Food Safety Bill

The Food Safety and Standard Bill 2005 (FSS) introduced by the Ministry of Food Processing Industries is posed to bring about a single statute and lay down standards for food articles and regulate their manufacture, trade and sale.

Having one rule instead of a plethora of legislations seems to make sense. However concerns have been raised over the FSS. Firstly, there is a tendency of leaning towards industry perspectives rather than a balanced position towards all the stakeholders, especially the poor and disadvantaged consumers. There is no representation from the food testing laboratories, medical profession and civil society in the statutory body which will be formed to perform the functions under the assigned act.

Secondly, the bill when passed will result in the repealing of the Infant Milk Substitute Act (IMS). Repealing of the IMS Act will have a serious negative impact on the promotion of breastfeeding and is therefore feared to lead to an increase in infant mortality rate. These areas are a cause of concern and need to be addressed before we have another piece of cumbersome legislation on our hands.



(cosumer-voice.org, Frontline, Vol-22)



### Discussions on the Rational Use of Drugs

As part of the ongoing project-'Rational Use of Drugs', CUTS-Calcutta Resource Centre along with partner organisations in nine states arranged for group discussions on the above topic. Discussions were held in Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Chennai, Guwahati, Jaipur, Kolkata, Lucknow, Mumbai and New Delhi. The discussions had participation from different stakeholders of the health system viz. doctors, nurses, pharmacists, drug manufacturers. There were also participants from various walks of life - advocates, social activists, teachers, scientists, journalists etc., who shared their views and beliefs on the topic.

The concept of rational drug use has many dimensions and the objective was to concentrate on that aspect which was relevant from a consumer's point of view. Hence, the discussions tried to gather the views and opinions of the general public regarding rational drug use from a consumers' perspective. Topics actively discussed and debated included self-medication, drug interactions, Over-the-Counter drugs, warning and labelling of important information on drugs and the importance of awareness amongst the general public. It was felt that even educated people did not pay heed to the small



### Meeting on 'Crusade Against Adulteration, Counterfeiting and Spurious Products'

CUTS arranged a meeting on 'Crusade against Adulteration, Counterfeiting and Spurious Products' on March 30th to celebrate World Consumer Rights Day. Panellists in the meeting included Mala Banerjee, President, Federation of Consumer Associations of West Bengal (FCAWB), R.K Adhikari, Dy. Commissioner, Enforcement Branch, Kolkata Police, K.K Sengupta from FCAWB and Jayanta Basu,

freelance journalist.

R.K Adhikari discussed in detail about the laws, which were framed to deal with the issues of counterfeit and adulteration - their strengths and limitations. The Food Safety and Standards Bill, 2005 was discussed and a demonstration was given on how to use simple different reagents to check whether different foodstuffs were adulterated or not. The meeting ended with the



#### Feedback

##### **BEWARE**

##### **Useful Material**

I read BEWARE with great interest and found it very useful for our social welfare organisation for the upliftment of the poor through education, health, rehabilitation, vocational and skill development training for adolescent girls and humanitarian services to the poor. We would be obliged if you could send us copies of BEWARE.

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#### SOURCES

BL: Business Line, CJP: Canadian Journal of Public Health, DTE: Down To Earth, ET: Economic Times, FT: Financial Times, TH: The Hindu, Tol: Times of India

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