

BEWARE

A Bi-monthly newsletter of CUTS Safety Watch



No.3/2004

कट्स CUTS

Indian Railways — Safe Enough?

Any technology, whether railway, power supply or aviation cannot attain 100 per cent safety. - reacted R N Malhotra, former Railway Board Chairman. This is regarding the accident that occurred when Mangalore-Kurla Matsyagandha Express jumped off the rails killing 20 people and injuring several others due to loose boulders falling on to the track. The obvious question comes to one's mind is whether to keep our fingers crossed while taking train rides.

Incidentally last year the Mumbai - Karwar Express toppled off the track after hitting boulders on the same Konkan Railway zone and claimed nearly 52 lives. The route proves to be prone to frequent landslides and a decision was taken to install metal mesh net to avoid accidents due to falling boulders on to the tracks. The recent accident revealed that a long stretch in the Roha region was left, causing the derailment.

Many of us may recall some other major train disasters in recent years: about 400 people were feared killed when two express trains collided head-on at the Gaisal railway station in 1999. In 2002, 100 passengers were killed while the most prestigious Rajdhani Express plunged into the Dhawe River, resulting from the fragile condition of the bridges. None of these should be overlooked in any systemic attempt to enhance safety.

"Safety" or "Economy"—The choice will obviously be the former for all of us. Even our new railway minister Laloo Prasad Yadav emphasises the need to strengthen the safety norms of Indian Railways and lack of funds should not come in the way.

In his budget speech, he promised to bring down the number of consequential train accidents per million train km.

A Special Railway Safety Fund (SRSF) of Rs. 17000 cr was created in 2002-2003 to wipe out arrears in renewal of over aged assets viz: track, bridges, rolling stock and signalling gear besides safety enhancement work, over a six year period. Though the minister claims that considerable progress has been made in the execution of works sanctioned under this fund, no activity report has been made public.

Incidentally Indian Railways have published a White Paper on Safety (WPS) in 2003. The document explains activities that are to be taken up by the authorities to maintain a high level of safety. A host of technical upgradations have been done in consonance with the above document, in the Indian Railways including the Konkan route.

However what is disconcerting is that in spite of installing state-of-the-art safety services along the route, accidents continue to occur.

The lack of true accountability of the Railways on the issue of safety needs to be urgently addressed. More often than not the report of the Railway commission on the probes on accident cases gather dust. Even when 'small' rail accidents (e.g. unmanned level crossings) possibly claim so many lives, a serious introspection is required to explore the lacunae in the system and attempt should be made to prevent them at the earliest. As a safety measure, pilot engines could be run in the vulnerable zones before any passenger or goods trains take the route.



Some Major Train Tragedies

- February, 1975: 43 people died and 74 were hurt when a train hit the end of a cul-de-sac tunnel at Moorgate Underground station in central London, UK.
- January, 1977: Australia's worst-ever railway disaster claimed. 83 lives when a commuter train derailed and crashed into the pillars of a bridge bringing it down on top of the train in Granville, Sydney.
- August, 1995: 400 people killed as Puroshottam Express, rams into Kalindi Express near Firozabad railway station in Uttar Pradesh.
- March, 2001: A crowded commuter train has collided head on with an empty train in central Belgium, leaving at least eight people dead.
- September, 2001: A collision between a passenger train and a locomotive has killed at least 31 people and injured dozens on the Indonesian Island of Java.
- April, 2004: At least 3,000 people were killed or injured when two trains, carrying oil and liquefied petroleum gas, collided and exploded in a North Korean train station near the Chinese border.

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Consumer Unity & Trust Society

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

Subscription Rs.50/ per annum

New Tool for Road Safety

The Geographical Kerala Accident Management System (GeoKams), developed as part of the Road Safety Engineering Initiatives for the World Bank-funded Kerala State Transport and Kerala Police Project by Technopark-based IBS Software Services, is to facilitate efficient recording and analysis of accident data in the coming days, the lack of which has been the bane of traffic planners & safety experts in India.

The Geographical Information System (GIS)-enabled system will be able to capture information about a road accident occurring at any place and its impact. The accident data can be plotted on digital maps and the software has the capability for in-depth GIS-enabled analysis. Colour coding has been provided to indicate the severity of accidents to enable the law enforcement agencies to redeploy personnel to the priority areas and to monitor and take corrective steps to curb accidents.

(TH, 04.06.04)

Traffic Cops with a Healing Touch

The first hour after an accident is called the "golden hour", which is extremely critical for the life or death of a victim. A traffic department study shows that, out of an average of 400 accident deaths in a year, half die due to the absence of a trauma care system and improper way of handling a victim. National statistics say, though Indian roads account for only one percent of the vehicles in the world, it accounts for six percent of accident-related deaths every year.

To minimise the mortality rate, trauma care experts from Apollo Gleneagles Hospital have been training sergeants pre-hospital trauma care, a well defined model developed by the American College



of Surgeons. The treatment is divided into five parts - control of airway, stabilising the cervical spine, circulation and control of external haemorrhage, disability and neurological assessment, and the right environment to prevent hypothermia.

(TOI, 17.05.04)

Strategy for Safe Singapore Roads

In Singapore, police currently rely on speed cameras at designated locations, hand-held radar guns and laser cameras, mounted laser cameras on overpasses, etc. in their bid to stop speeding, but to no effect. The number of tickets issued for speeding has risen sharply, from 35,361 in 2002 to 48,667 last year. And in the first three months of this year alone, more than 13,000 motorists were booked for speeding.

All traffic police motorcycles will now be fitted with radar guns that allow cops to nab speeding motorists almost instantly. This means speeding drivers will not have time to react - the most important change of all, because it could motivate motorists to drive more carefully all the time, and not only when someone is watching them.

(STS, 25.06.04)

Cash Award to Boost Air Safety

Airborne collision avoidance systems can only see aircraft with transponders that register their position. But the comparatively heavy weight of the battery needed to power the devices makes it impossible to fit them in gliders and other light aircrafts. So many light aircrafts are currently virtually "invisible" to safety devices used by jetliners and air-traffic controllers and therefore banned from operating in many areas.

A Balerno-based firm, Trig Avionics, is working to create the electronic equivalent of "fluorescent jackets" which will allow small aircraft, microlights, gliders and hot-air balloons to be spotted by radar and specialist systems that would prevent mid-air collisions.

For this innovation Trig Avionics has become one of 17 firms to receive a share of ú850,000 in grants under the Scottish Executive-backed SMART programme which aims to stimulate the creation of new businesses and to help fledgling firms employing fewer than 50 staff to improve their competitiveness by developing new products and processes.

(EN, 25.05.04)

Cosmetics to dye for?

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not require safety data on ingredients used in beauty and personal-care products such. This weakness on the part of the government has allowed the industry to market cosmetics and personal-care products with ingredients whose safety is unclear says a report released by the Environmental Working Group, the Breast Cancer Fund and other public-interest groups.

Examination of 77 such products, primarily hair dyes and shampoos, revealed that every third product contains one or more ingredients classified by the government as possibly cancer-causing.

Little research is available to document the safety or health risks of low-dose repeated exposures to chemical mixtures like those in personal-care products, but the absence of data should never be mistaken for proof of safety. However, any safety testing and reporting by manufacturers to the FDA is completely voluntary.

(SHNS, 07.06.04)

Artificial Sweeteners in Soft Drinks

There's trouble brewing for soft-drink giants Coca-cola and Pepsico, along with some other companies, over their use of the artificial sweeteners, aspartame and saccharin. Several lawsuits have been filed in different US courts. Aspartame is said to be a neurotoxin; saccharin was banned in the US in 1981 and was re-instated in 2000 after obtaining a clean chit against being a suspected carcinogen.

It is noteworthy that in India, the use of artificial sweeteners - most of which contain aspartame - is permitted for many food items.

(DTE, 31.05.04)



Fact Sheet

Year	Accidents	Deaths	Injury
1998	3,520	454	3,446
1998	3,219	458	3,019
2000	3,165	452	3,316
2001	2,620	440	2,490
2002	2,149	457	1766

* In 2003, 442 persons died Number of hit and run cases: 543.

Prevention is Better than Cure

In Dubai a 12 year girl died for using a SAFA mineral water bottle for a protracted period of 16 months. The plastic (polyethylene terephthalate or PET) used in these bottles contains a potentially carcinogenic element - diethyl-hydroxylamine or DEHA.



The bottles are safe for one-time use only. In case of bare necessity, it could be used at the most for one week. They must be kept away from heat as well. Repeated washing and rinsing causes the plastic to break down causing carcinogens to leak into drinking water. So it is advisable to invest into multiple use water bottles.

(DTE, 31.05.04)

Choco-'Puffs'

If your children are fond of chicken puffs and vegetable puffs, do go ahead and indulge them. But the moment you hear they are fond of chocolate 'puffs' or vanilla 'puffs' let your mental antennae work overtime to make sure these are also of the baked variety.



Tobacco giant British American Tobacco (BAT) has been testing cigarettes flavoured with substances such as chocolate, vanilla, cherry juice, even wine and sherry. Anti-tobacco campaigners such as Action on Tobacco and Health (ASH), reacted with fury,

condemning the tests as an apparent attempt to make tobacco more appealing to young people, and labelled it as 'appalling'. A BAT spokesman however expectedly dismissed the notion that the company aimed to attract children with new flavourings.

(ET, 03.06.04)

Using Mobile while Driving - Unsafe !

A huge controversy is raging across the world, over whether the use of mobile phones while driving is an unsafe practice. Though many countries across the economic spectrum (including India) have banned such usage, the controversy refuses to die down. Proponents of the cell-phone assert that it is a vital productivity tool in the modern day world and "being in touch", even during the couple of hours of driving time each day, is very important. They allege that sufficient research has not been conducted to dub the mobile phone a villain. If the 'hand-held' mobile is the bugbear, they aver, dashboard or two-wheeler handle mounted instruments could certainly be allowed. As per the proponents, this practice would then be no more distracting than eating or drinking while driving.



However, police authorities and road safety experts are rather adamant about the ban. They emphasise that in fact a lot of research has gone into it and cite statistics such as: hand-held phones cause as much as 50% distraction; even with dashboard mounted instruments the

distraction is 30%. A study done in Australia reveals that 58% of drivers in the age group 17 to 29 read text messages or SMS while driving, where obviously the distraction level is much higher.

(ET, 16.05.04 & SMH, 10.06.04)

Reliability of Codex Standards!

One big obsession of 'lazy' Indian authorities responsible for regulating pesticides is to take refuge in standards set by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC). But standards set by Codex are comparatively lenient than those set by some individual countries themselves. CAC admits that they depend, entirely, on the data supplied by the manufacturers of chemicals. More over, no one bothers about adverse effects of chemicals, discovered after initial approval, and it is up to 'honest' manufacturers to withdraw the same on their own.

In this era of industrially processed packaged food, transnational corporations are selling "unsafe" food and beverages happily, hiding behind the weakness of Codex. So the time has come to forthwith formulate and implement our own standards in India, taking our own diet habits into account. Waiting for a 'reformed' Codex can turn out to be very expensive in human terms.

(DTE, 31.05.04)

Danger of Air Freshners

Researchers at the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) say, a potentially harmful smog can form inside homes through reactions between air-freshners and ozone. Ozone, a common urban pollutant, is produced when vehicle emissions react with sunlight. The reaction generates formaldehyde, classed as a probable carcinogen, and related compounds, that many experts believe are responsible for respiratory problems. They studied the reaction between ozone gas and fragrance molecules such as pinene and limonene.



(ET, 16.05.04)

Products Recalled During May-June, 2004 in US in Cooperation with the US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)



Coaster Co. of America, Santa Fe Springs, California, voluntarily recalled metal twin/twin and twin/full bunk beds. A gap between the step of the built-in ladder and the top bunk allows enough room for a child's body to slip through but will not allow for a child's head to pass through. This poses a serious strangulation risk.

GapKids, of San Francisco, California, voluntarily recalled Girls' Straw Cowboy Hat. The straw hat is constructed using a thin wire within a seam. The tip of the wire can break free from the seam, posing a laceration hazard. GapKids has received two reports of customers who received minor scratches from the exposed wire tip. A 7-year-old child received a scratch on the leg and a 12-year-old received a scratch on the forehead.

12 models of hand-held hair dryers are recalled. They are not equipped with a mandatory immersion protection device to prevent electrocution if the hair dryer falls into water.

(Www.cpsc.gov)

Consumers Today: Where They Stand

Safety Watch unit of CUTS - Calcutta Resource Centre and Consumer Affairs Department, Govt. of West Bengal organised a presentation on the theme "Consumers Today: Where They Stand" at Rotary Sadan, Kolkata on June 21.

In session I, Pradeep S. Mehta, the main speaker made a presentation on a seminal CUTS' study "State of the Indian Consumer" where he compared a set of guidelines given by the UN to assist governments to frame consumer policies, against the ground realities as experienced by the Indian consumers.

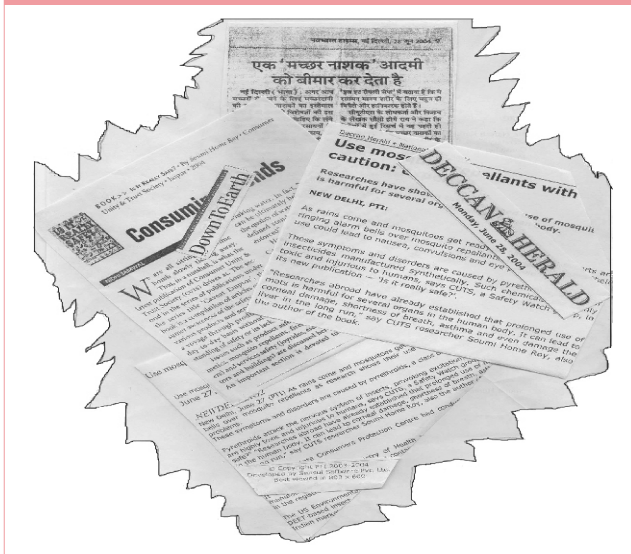


In session II, Soumi Home Roy made a presentation on her book "Is It Really Safe?" where she informed the participants about various consumer safety aspects related goods and services.

Distinguished personalities like Naren De, Minister-in-charge and Principal Secretary, Cooperation and Consumer Affairs Department, Government of West Bengal; N. Arif Secretary General, ICC; P. Rohatgi, an eminent Consumer Activist; and Indira Chakravarty, Director Professor and Dean, AIIPH moderated and spoke on the occasion.

The event drew about 125 participants from different government departments, consumer clubs in schools, chamber of commerce, academia, consumer organisations, different trade associations and media.

REVIEW - "IS IT REALLY SAFE?"



Campaign on Section 134

It is axiomatic that many lives could be saved or many disabilities avoided, if victims of road accidents receive immediate medical attention. Unfortunately in India, the chance of a road accident victim getting prompt medical care is very little, though it is very much covered under law.

In 1989, in Parmanand Katara vs. Union of India case, the Supreme Court passed an order that any Doctor (or clinic) can be approached for immediate treatment and that is their duty to do so without fear of harassment. Subsequently, in 1994, Section 134 of The Motor Vehicles' Act 1988 was amended to cover this exigency.

CUTS has undertaken a campaign to aware the film/serial directors so that they can spread the right message through their films/serials. CUTS has also requested the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways and DG Police of all states to take appropriate actions to popularise Section 134.

SOURCES: ST: The Straits Times, TOI: The Times of India, DTE: Down to Earth, TH: The Hindu, FAO: Food and Agriculture Organisation, EN: Evening News, SHNS: Scripps Howard News Service, ET: The Economic Times, SMH: The Sydney Morning Herald. NMHC: National Mental Health Information Centre.

Feedback

Need of the Hour

Received bi-monthly newsletter BEWARE, and the book "Is It Really Safe?". These publications are the need of the hour. Please accept our hearty congratulations for the yeomen services rendered by CUTS to consumers. The contents are really enlightening and educative. We are waiting for the next book "Deadly Profits".

*T. Balachandran, President
Kerala Consumer Service Society
Kerala, India*

Keep It Up

We have received a copy of the book. Congratulations both on the idea behind the book and its contents. We had already published the article relating to Milk in one of our issues of Consumer Network Magazine, We are including the article on toys in our June issue. Keep it up.

*S. Krishnan, Director
Consumer Coordination Council
New Delhi, India*

Comprehensive Information Base

Congratulations on the very useful publication 'Is It Really Safe?'. I have received it this afternoon and finished reading the night. It would be one of the most comprehensive information base for Consumer Rights. Hope CUTS would continue to offer such excellent and useful publication.

*Asish Ghosh, Director
Centre for Environment and Development
Kolkata, India*

Useful Material for Research

Thank you for your magazine "BEWARE" and also your book entitled 'Is It Really Safe?'. As we have a club on Consumer Rights these materials are very useful for our children's research. We do hope you will continue to send such material from now on.

*S. M. Cyril, Principal
Loreto Day School Sealdah
Kolkata, India*

Advisory Board

Dinesh Mohan

Coordinator, Transportation Research
& Injury Prevention Programme,
IIT, New Delhi

P. Bhattacharya

Principal Secretary, Dept. Of Consumer
Affairs, Govt. of West Bengal, Kolkata

R. Desikan

Convenor, Consumers Association
of India, Chennai

Swarn Kohli

President, Consumer Education &
Research Centre (CERC), Ahmedabad

Ravi Agarwal

Director, Toxics Link, New Delhi

Udayan Nambodiri

Senior Editor, The Pioneer, New Delhi

Pradeep S. Mehta

Secretary General, CUTS-International, Jaipur

Published by Consumer Unity & Trust Society, (CUTS), 3, Suren Tagore Road, Calcutta 700019, India, Ph: 91.33.2460 1424,
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The news/stories in this Newsletter are compressed from several newspapers. The sources given are to be used as a reference for further information and do not indicate the literal transcript of a particular news/story.

Request for information on toy related accidents

Playing with toys is an essential part of every child's development. But unfortunately toys are not without their hazards. Each year, quite a few children get hurt while playing with toys. But such incidents are rarely reported in newspapers.

Although the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has specific standards for toys, manufacturers are not obliged to adhere to them, unless the toy is for export. Thus there is no guarantee of safe toys in the market and our children are at great risk. Our endeavour is to document cases from major cities of India, and prepare an advocacy tool to advocate with the Ministry of Consumer Affairs to make the BIS safety standards mandatory for toys, whether domestic or imported.

By filling out the form below, you can report any injury or death involving unsafe toys to us, so that we can document the same. We may contact you by mail, phone or email for further details. Please provide as much information as possible.

Your name:.....

Your address:.....

Your telephone (with STD code):.....

Your email address (if any):.....

Name of victim*.....

Victim's sex:..... Victim's age:.....

Victim's address:.....

Victims' telephone (with STD code):

Describe the toy involved:.....

Brand name/manufacturer:.....

Place where manufactured:.....

When was the toy purchased:.....

Please describe the incident or hazard, including description of injuries:

Did victim's parents consult any doctor: Yes/No

If yes, Doctor's name and qualification:

Did the parents take any step of complaining the incident: Yes/No

If yes, details:.....

.....

* The term 'Victim' covers any child injured or exposed to a possible toy-related hazard.