

BEWARE

A Bi-monthly Newsletter of CUTS Safety Watch

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Let Not Joy Rides End up in Sorrow

The onset of the festive season in India brings out the hitherto repressed feelings of revelry when, for once, counting the last farthing is not a priority. This is the time most of all, when people try to indulge their families' whims. What better opportunity that Papa can be cajoled into allowing that ride on the merry-go-round or Ferris wheel! This is also when the people in the amusement business get cracking. And no wonder! The better part of their annual turnover is realised during this period.

Unfortunately, in their intensity to make most of this time-bound opportunity, there is a tendency among amusement operators to sometimes give safety a go by. This is more evident in temporary fair grounds. The operators' social environment is often such that overt safety awareness is the exception rather than the rule. This is compounded by the fact that the hay has to be made only in the limited time while the sun shines.

Reports coming from the media give a rather alarming picture of the

number of accidents-sometimes resulting in deaths-associated with the amusement business. In some shrill media reports rides have, on



occasion, been described to the extent of being veritable death traps. Lamentably the amusement industry has, to a large extent, brought it upon itself, by an overriding profit motive and sheer negligence.

CUTS Safety Watch has been addressing these issues since long (a

collage of coverage made in the print media based on our press release, is given on the backpage) and as far our knowledge goes, there is no formal authority overseeing these operations, apart from the police. This is not a law and order issue *prima-facie*, that one can expect the police to be proactively involved. The need of the day is to have a separate authority looking after these operations as fair sites shift from location to location involving fresh installation of the rides at each site. The repetitive nature of the work, site in and site out, could also instil a sense of *deja vu* that could potentially lead to accidents. Lack of standards thus far was also a handicap.

It is a matter of satisfaction that the Bureau of Indian Standards has now come out with a 'Code of Recommended Practice' for 'Amusement Ride Safety' (IS 15475). In the same genre of standards on amusement safety, they have also incidentally drawn up IS 15492 (Safety in Water Parks). We wait to see what steps the Government takes towards implementation of these standards.

Aghast Joy-Rides

- Mumbai, Maharashtra, May, 1998 - A woman was scalped ghastly during a joyride at Binil Handloom Fair at the Police Wireless ground in Santa Cruz (W), Mumbai.
- Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu, May, 2003 - At a temple festival, a giant wheel snapped and crashed in a gale, injuring 23 and killing eight people.
- Basaveshwarnagar, Karnataka, March, 2003 - A women suffered a huge swelling while the 'dashing car' at Fun World in Taj Expo at the Palace Ground, moved in the opposite
- direction and rammed into the stage causing a whiplash.
- New Delhi, May, 2003 - At a festival, a Ferris wheel collapsed in strong winds and rain, killing 12 people and injuring 20. The wheel was carrying at least 30 people when it collapsed and the victims were crushed.
- Pavagadh, Gujarat, January, 2003 - Seven people were killed and 45 others were injured when a chairlift, which carried pilgrims to a temple at the top of the hill, partially collapsed.

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Health Nuggets

Rofecoxib: Friendlier or Deadlier?

Merck & Co, one of the largest drug companies in the US, voluntarily withdrew one of their cash cows, Rofecoxib (brand name: Vioxx; annual sales \$2.55bn) from the market in October. Patients in the US on long term treatment with this popular medication for pain relief in arthritis, menstruation etc., were, in a survey, found to be at twice the risk of suffering cardiovascular events than those administered a placebo.



Ironically, when Vioxx and other brands of the same genre were initially marketed in 1999, they were touted as safer, being less likely to cause ulcers or stomach bleeding associated with earlier drugs such as Aspirin or Ibuprofen.

The Government of India's Health Ministry may not ban Rofecoxib right away because of its efficacy in the short term but are keeping a close eye on the situation.

(BS, 01.10.04 & ET, 10.10.04)

Air Pollution Affects Children

Children who live in polluted communities are five times more likely to have clinically low lung function - less than 80 percent of the lung function expected of their age.

A US study found that children living in the most polluted communities had significant reductions in their "forced expiratory volume" - the volume of air that can be exhaled after taking a deep breath - as compared to children with cleaner air. This indicates that normal growth of lung capacity is thwarted by air pollution.

Children or young adults with low lung function can contract respiratory troubles more easily or be able to weather the same with more difficulty.

(NIHN, 08.09.04)

Postal Supply can Spoil Drugs

Some medicines may degrade quickly when they are shipped through the mail and exposed to extreme temperatures, a study in the US suggests. Researchers specifically found that a commonly inhaled asthma preparation, Formoterol, when exposed to 70°C for four hours (the equivalent of being inside a mailbox or car on a Arizona summer

day) delivered less than half its punch and showed significant physical change. The finding is especially important considering that it is the elderly who are asthma-prone and, also lacking in mobility, often order medicines through mail. Patients also save by paying less often for a 90-day supply.

Doctors warned that the mail order companies should respect drug-makers' warnings about temperature and humidity for storing drugs and pay more attention to how they package and ship at-risk medications. Patients are also cautioned about proper storage.

(Reuters, 28.10.04 & SHNS, 27.10.04)

Microbes to 'Kill' Aqueous Arsenic

University of Illinois, USA, researchers have found microbial processes can both indicate and eradicate the presence of arsenic in groundwater.

The researchers found strong variation in arsenic concentration from well to well in an aquifer in Central Illinois. The concentration of arsenic varied inversely with the concentration of sulphate. Methane concentrations also varied with the sulphate content.

So, adding sulphate to naturally

contaminated groundwater might be a simple method to sequester the arsenic. Sulphate salts help to stimulate the bacteria.

(UPI, 27.10.04)

Improving Immunity

Vaccines have saved millions of lives. But in order to maintain their quality, they must be stored at the appropriate temperature from the time they are manufactured right up to the moment of use. An estimated cost of maintaining this 'cold chain', as it is called, is about \$200mn annually, and yet it still breaks down frequently.



A leading Indian bio-tech firm,

Panacea Biotech, is on the cusp of manufacturing a revolutionary vaccine, using a unique new 'stable liquid' technology developed by the English company Cambridge Biostability, which would not require the vaccines to be refrigerated.

If it works, vaccines could, in future, have an extended shelf life of many months, or even years. This would enable a further ten million children to be vaccinated annually using existing budgets.

(TOI, 26.10.04)

Health Hazards

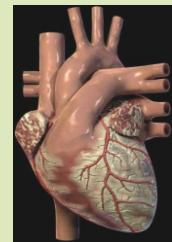
- **Effect of Skipping Breakfast:** 50 percent of children skip breakfast: expert. Skipping breakfast can lower glucose levels and cause headaches. Lack of breakfast affects memory and learning abilities.

(TH, 18.10.04)

- **Benefit of Breast feeding:** Researchers in Pittsburgh, USA, say that breast feeding babies exclusively for the first four months reduces the risk of obesity when they reach preschool age.

(UPI, 13.10.04)

- **Causes of Heart Attack Identified:** A study on 29,000 people in 52 countries revealed that two factors alone - an abnormal ratio of bad to good cholesterol and smoking - were responsible for two-thirds of the global risk of heart attack. Other risk factors were high blood pressure, diabetes, abdominal obesity, stress, a lack of daily consumption of fruits and vegetables and lack of daily exercise. Drinking small amounts of alcohol regularly was found to reduce the risk slightly.



(ET, 01.09.04)

- **Delhiites Gasp for Pure Air:** Two out of every five Delhiites are paying the price of a metropolitan lifestyle: they suffer lung impairment. This and many such frightening findings emerged in a study commissioned by the Central Pollution Control Board and conducted by Chittaranjan National Cancer Institute, Kolkata.

(TOI, 26.10.04)

Pot Pourri

"Safe Streets for Children"

There are 45,000 road deaths per year in Europe and governments there are trying hard to reduce the number. In this matter, children are the most vulnerable, particularly those living in urban areas.

Starting on September 16, the theme of this year's European Mobility Week was "Safe Streets for Children". Over 1000 cities, across the European Union (EU), will participate in the event. The EU launched the programme with a high-level conference in Brussels, called "Smart Moves for Sustainable Mobility" focussing on how to give people options to change their behaviour towards more sustainable means of transport.

(Europa, 16.09.04)



Asbestos Cement Products are Safe

According to Jacques Dunnigan, scientist and researcher, six different varieties of asbestos are being used commercially, of which chrysotile (white) asbestos is the safest. Cement 'locks in' asbestos fibres firmly and so can not escape into the atmosphere under normal conditions of use, posing no risk. Western studies show that, asbestos fibre could be an occupational health risk only when it becomes airborne and its dust is inhaled in excessive amounts for a prolonged period.

In India, only chrysotile fibre is used and the exposure levels are less than one fibre/cc, which is 50 to 100 times lower than in western countries. Above all, asbestos is cost-effective and have a life of more than 60 years, have properties similar to hard concrete-like material, need negligible maintenance and insulate heat and noise.

(TOI, 13.09.04)

Adulterated Coconut Oil

A sample study of branded and packaged coconut oil, conducted by the Coconut Development Board in Mumbai markets, has shown that most of the oils did not conform to the Agmark grade.

The study done on 14 brands showed that atleast 10 did not meet the standards, being adulterated by paraffin/mineral oil.

(BL, 26.10.04)

Accident Rate down: Air Chief

This year the Indian Air Force (IAF) has made improvements in several areas to cut down on the major causes of aircraft crashes like pilot error, technical error, bird-hit and environmental causes. Once upon a time IAF lost as many as 48 aircraft in a single year, which this year has been reduced to 18 aircraft.

As a result, the accident rate per 10,000 hours of flying was 0.83 this year. This was the lowest in the last four decades.

(TH, 07.10.04)

Safe CNG Technology

There have been fire accidents because of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) leaks and cylinder bursts in buses. In the current CNG system, gas is compressed at high pressure. A prominent engineering institute in Roorke, in collaboration with Russia's Central Research Institute for Special Machinery, has claimed to have developed a new technology for making light-weight cylinders that store CNG at a low pressure to prevent accidents and makes roads safer.

This would also save the country's foreign exchange as currently natural gas is compressed into CNG at gas stations using imported compressors which cost about Rs. 5cr. The new system would allow the use of gas at a lower pressure, making utilisation of indigenous compressors.

New cylinders would be less heavy and thus could be lifted on top of the vehicle. Even if there is a leak, the gas would merge with the environment.

(BS, 21.10.04)



Mobile Phones Increase Tumour Risk

Research by the Karolinska Institute, one of Europe's largest medical universities and clinical biomedical research centres, revealed that long-term (more than 10 years) mobile phone users have nearly double the normal risk of getting a tumour on a nerve connecting the ear to the brain. The risk is confined to the side of the head where the phone is usually held and there are no indications of increased risk for those who have used their mobile for less than 10 years.

The institute also said that it is not

determined if the results would be similar for long-term use of digital (GSM) phones. But the mobile phone industry has denied finding any scientific evidence of negative health effects from use of mobile phones.

William Stewart's government appointed Expert Group on Mobile Phones and Health concluded that the weight of available evidence indicated no adverse health effects from use of mobiles. However, children should only use them in emergencies.

(Reuters, 14.10.2004)

"Sober" Safety on Indian Rails

The Indian Railways have introduced a computerised signsafe system for locomotive pilots to ensure their alcohol-free sign-on and sign-off. The system has been introduced in Kota, Jabalpur and Bhopal divisions of the West Central Railway. After its success, the system would be introduced in all zonal railways across the country.

(BS, 24.10.04)

Products Recalled



Dell Inc. of Washington has recalled about 9,90,000 power adapters used with some Dell Latitude, Precision and Inspiron note-book computers sold between September 1998 and February 2002, because of a risk of overheating, which could lead to a fire or electric shock. Dell has received seven reports of incidence involving AC adapters overheating, but no injuries were reported.

(BL, 10.10.04)

Toyota Motor Corporation will recall 1,76,372 vehicles in Japan to fix the brakes in four models viz., The fun Cargo, BB compact cars, Celica and MR-S Sports car. Volvo is recalling 4.6 lakh vehicles worldwide because a wiring problem could cause a fan to overheat and burn. The recall involves S80 and S60 sedans and XC70 and V70 wagons from the 1999, 2000 and 2001 models.



(FE, 15.09.04)

