

BEWARE

A Bi-monthly Newsletter of CUTS Safety Watch



No. 6/2004

Check out your Child's Teether – it Contains Toxin!

Toys are indeed good friends of a child, but how safe are those for her/him? The forthcoming Christmas would bring a lot of toys for children as gifts from their parents or relatives. But it is time to take a look into the safety aspects of the gifts. The most adorable toys like teddies, balls, moving creatures or teethers: do they conform to the safety standards required to protect a child's health?

Nearly 70 percent of popular toys are made of plastics. According to experts, PVC (polyvinyl chloride), a kind of plastic, is used to make toys soft and flexible. But the matter of concern is that PVC is a toxic material and can cause harm to our children's health. Among other chemicals, PVC contains toxic phthalates, which give the material the required elasticity and softness, do not completely bind to the plastic and leach over time up to a rate of one percent per year.

CUTS Safety Watch began research on the issue in 2003 and found a shocking result that people are often more ignorant than aware about the dangers associated with the pleasurable word "toy". It also came

across the fact that the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has the following standards for toy safety: IS 9873:



- Part I: 2001 Safety aspects related to mechanical and physical properties
- Part II: 1999 Flammability requirement
- Part III: 1999 Migration of certain elements

But the manufacturers are not obliged to adhere to the standards unless they are exporting their products!

It is essential for the parents to pay attention while selecting a toy on the

different requirements of the child according to his or her age and development. One needs to consider the child's age and strength, too, as children can be surprisingly strong. We may opt for toys made of natural material considering that these are usually bitten, tugged, sucked, jumped on, thrown about and generally abused.

Now the question remains as to why the government is not proactive in making safety standards mandatory for toys meant for the domestic market. Thanks to an enlightened society, manufacturers themselves recall faulty or dangerous toys from the market in countries like the US.

Here comes the role of CUTS-Safety Watch to advocate at the policy level for suitable legal framework to ensure toy safety for children. Readers are encouraged to contribute accident cases related to toys, enabling us to prepare an advocacy document for further action. Our effort to make our country a safer place to live in (from babyhood itself!) Would be strengthened with active participation by the people at large.

Unsafe Toys

- Delta Enterprise Corporation of New York recalled their 'Director's Chair for Children' as that can inadvertently be misassembled and the fabric seat can come off the chair's frame to expose metal support rods causing laceration to young children. Cases reported that children received lacerations from the exposed rod, required stitches or suffered injuries.
- The Swedish company IKEA announced recalling a little soft toy called "SNUTTIG" because the seams of the toy tended to burst and the plastic beads inside posed a risk to small children.
- Hasbro Incorporated of Pawtucket, Rhode Islands, US, recalled its NERF Big Play Football. Eight out of nine cases reported where children required stitches for the injury caused by the hard plastic interior frame of the football.
- Graco Children's Products, Incorporated of Exton, Philadelphia, US recalled its Bumble Bee Toys with blue antennae. Graco received 26 reports of the antennae breaking off the toys, including five reports of children who started to choke on the broken antennae.

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Product Punch

Non-iodised Salt to be Banned Again

It is reported that iodine deficiency disorders (IDD) are increasing in India and the government may ban non-iodised salt once again. IDD leads to mental handicap and, in a survey, 241 districts out of 282 reported high incidence.



Health experts recommend a strict regulation in the matter. A recent All India Institute of Medical Sciences' study in Delhi, whose government has banned non-iodised salt, reported marked decrease in goitre cases. Umesh Kapil, who led the study, says, "The goitre problem is cosmetic but the lack of T3 (tri-iodothyronine), which makes irreparable loss to brain development, is quite serious."

Meanwhile, a health ministry official says that he is not aware of reconsideration of the ban.

(DTE, 31.12.04)

Steps to Make Safer Cars

As a first standard towards auto safety, the US and 21 other countries are to sign an agreement to adopt a tougher measure for vehicle door latches. The US National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimated that 11 people die in the US each year because their doors fall open, at the time of crashes.

In a separate move, General Motors (GM) and Ford Motor are

going to introduce anti-rollover technology as standard equipment on Sports Utility Vehicles (SUVs) next year. GM also wants to implement Electronic Stability Control (ESC) system. The ESC technology improves the vehicle's lateral stability and electronically combines the attributes of anti-lock brakes and traction control systems, which reduces the possibility of accidents.

In India, the government is going to amend car safety standards according to the recommendations of the Bureau of Indian Standards and following international norms. Of the 40 standards notified, 16 are either fresh or existing norms modified. The notification would be brought under a suitable legal ambit. Though the government has taken cognizance of the need for a suitable 'child restraining system' in passenger cars, the mode of implementation is still under discussion.



(ET, 16.11.04 & BS, 16.12.04)

Tips on Careful Lift-handling

Many housing societies do not give proper attention to preventive measures of passenger lifts. The lackadaisical attitude of enforcement agencies spell dangers to users. For example, the Public Works Department is responsible for certifying the safety of the installation. But how far this system works, is a matter of doubt.

Due to the improper handling of the devices, the in-built fail-safe mechanism may not operate in emergencies. So it is suggested that only qualified engineers or attendants from original manufacturers/authorized agents should be called for the repair work

(Keemat Nov., 2004)

Unsafe Drive with Hands Free Phones

With adverse comments being made over using hand held phones while driving, some US carmakers are introducing high-tech voice recognition systems in cars that will dial a required number on the driver's command. Automakers, their suppliers and cellphone manufacturers are pitching handsfree technology as a safe way to rein in the expanding clutter of gadgetry that can leave drivers grabbing for everything but the steering wheel. While some states in the US, having banned hand-held cellphones, approve of such hands-free technology, how safe are these devices really?



A recent study suggests that hands-free adaptors are actually no safer. Driver distractions play a role in 25 to 30 percent of accidents, and include everything from eating, to talking over cellphones, to changing radio stations, while driving.

(TOI, 27.12.04)

Herbal Lipstick and Medicinal Beer

The National Botanical Research Institute (NBRI), Lucknow, have developed a wonderful herbal lipstick, as well as a medicinal beer that would protect the liver. This lipstick has its basis in aromas that allow subdermal absorption of chemical elements. The medicinal beer is an anti-oxidant liver protective and has tremendous cooling properties.

The scientists are researching other herbs and plants that are mentioned in the Vedas and the Bhrihu Samhita. The scientists are developing a granular food that could save both mothers and kids from malnutrition and also enhance the kids' IQ.



(RP, 08.11.04)

Products Recalled

The South African counterpart of Ranbaxy recalled its entire portfolio of AIDS drugs viz. Lamaid, Nevran, Zidaid and Avocomb tablets. The decision has been taken on the basis of a report to WHO which highlighted problems with bioequivalence studies for Avocomb tablets. (TOI, 01.11.04)

Swing-N-Slide Corporation announced a voluntary recall of its extra-duty and heavy-duty swing seats manufactured in China. A manufacturing defect can cause the metal grommet securing the seat, to break. If this happens, the user can fall to the ground. Swing-N-Slide has received five reports of the swing's seat breaking. No injuries have been reported.



(www.cpsc.gov)

Raymond Geddes Company announced a voluntary recall of metallic necklaces manufactured in China. The necklaces contain high levels of lead. CPSC regulations ban children's products from containing high levels of lead due to the risk of lead poisoning resulting from contact with these products. The necklaces also contain a sharp point, posing a laceration hazard to young children. Though the company has not received any reports of incidents, this recall is being conducted to prevent the possibility of injury.



(www.cpsc.gov)

Pot Pourri

Avoid Colours in Food Items

A study conducted by the Industrial Toxicology Research Centre, Lucknow, India, revealed that some brightly coloured sweets and snacks contain non-permissible synthetic dyes, being cheaper and more readily available than natural ones. These dyes cause ill effects like growth retardation, indigestion, anaemia, skin allergies, damage to liver and kidney, and even cancer.



Colour is mixed to the food items to allure consumers. For example, Metanin Yellow and Orange-2 was found in many foods. Harmful dyes were found to be more in the rural areas and in the roadside shops rather than in the big ones.

Some other samples had revealed the use of permissible colours in more than the specified limit of 100 parts per million. The study also says that the trend of using these dyes has declined in comparison to the '70's (as high as 60 percent then).

(TH, 08.11.04)

Pesticides in Colas

According to a recent order of the Supreme Court, the Pepsi Foods Limited and Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages (Private) Limited have to specify the ingredients, including the pesticide content on labels of their products to inform consumers, specifically children, about what they consume.

There is an interesting sidelight to the issue of pesticides in colas. It seems the controversy of pesticides in colas and the much flaunted news item of farmers using the drinks as pesticides, has come full circle. Centre for Sustainable Agriculture (CSA), an NGO in India, has planned to conduct a controlled experiment to

test the result of this unusual practice of using colas instead of pesticides. Farmers in the



southern state of Andhra Pradesh in India, often use a homemade cocktail that uses jaggery in order to attract ants to turn away pests. That's where the colas come in. CSA wants to test the hypothesis that it is the high sugar content in the colas (and not the pesticide content) that actually attracts the ants, who do the rest. Cola companies are obviously waiting with bated breath!

(DTE, 31.12.04 & TOI, 09.11.04)

Safeguards for Doctors

Recently in an order, the Government of West Bengal has prohibited any immediate action against any doctor merely on the basis of a medical negligence allegation.

All district police superintendents have been asked to first consult the District Medical Officer of Health (DMOH). If the Chief Medical Officer of Health and the committee appointed by DMOH find the doctor to be guilty, then only the doctor can be arrested. The order is in line with the recent verdict of the Supreme Court, which says that the doctor cannot be charged with medical negligence till ratified by an expert committee.

Till date two charges have been levelled in such cases. One of them is culpable homicide not amounting to murder, which may lead to ten years of imprisonment. Another is relatively simpler, causing death due to negligence, which has a maximum penalty of two years in jail.

(TOI, 16.11.04)



Caution-tips to Would-be Mothers

Studies by Harvard University, US researchers revealed that mothers who smoke during or after pregnancy increase their babies' risk of developing colic. The culprit, according to studies, is likely to be nicotine, which increases blood levels of a gut protein involved in digestion.

Another study done by Australian scientists assured that ultrasound scan, the non-invasive procedure done routinely to assess the size, growth, health and gestational age of the foetus, does not harm the unborn baby or restrict the child's growth or development later in life.

(ET, 04.12.04)

Making Kerala Highways Safer

Kerala has decided to make its existing highways safe through the application of Geocam-Global Positioning System (GPS) duo at its National Highway trouble spots along with a string of 500 bus bays and 11 bypasses.

Asian Development Bank will be granting a loan of \$200mn for this under its 'Sustainable Urban

Development Project'. If it helps in building the Digital photogrammetry in conjunction with GPS on road, Kerala will be the first state in India and fourth in Asia (after China, Singapore and Indonesia), to have this technology for road safety.

(FE, 01.12.04)

Autonomy to CRS

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport has suggested that the Commission of Railway Safety (CRS) be made an autonomous body. In its 83rd report, the House panel said that to be impartial, CRS should work independently, outside the control of either the Ministries of Railways or Civil Aviation.

The committee further recommended that the Railway Board or the Zonal Railways must not invalidate any recommendation of CRS unilaterally. In case of running a new train, the sanction from CRS should be made mandatory. Moreover it advised the railway administration not

to suspect any *prima facie* cause of any accident in front of the media, when the enquiry is pending with CRS. The committee also suggested the implementation of a comprehensive legislation which could improve the functioning of the CRS.

(BL, 03.12.04)

Pills to Stop Drug Abuse

A study conducted by the University of Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia Veterans Affairs Medical Centre, US, shows that anti-obesity pills can fight obesity as well as smoking, two of the biggest foes of life. Drugs like Rimonabant or Acomplia not only help in losing weight, but also keep it off for two years. Moreover, addiction experts opined that these pills can also be used in any treatment of addiction. Studies on animals suggest Rimonabant can block the effects of marijuana and fight alcohol and cocaine abuse.



(ET, 15.11.04)

Safety Watch in Action

Right to Safety - Students as Consumers

CUTS-Safety Watch organised a two hour interactive programme at Don Bosco School, Park Circus, Kolkata on December 18, 2004 to celebrate the forthcoming "National Consumer Day". The programme aimed to build awareness among young minds on the issues of "Consumer Protection" in general and "Right to Safety" in particular.

Fr T V Jacob, Principal, Don Bosco School, inaugurated the programme.

On behalf of the Consumer Affairs Department, Government of West Bengal, Ashok Bhattacharya, Controller of Legal Metrology, gave a thorough presentation on the different aspects of consumer rights. He spoke briefly on the history of the consumer movement.

A presentation by Mita Dutta, Centre Coordinator at CUTS' Kolkata office followed, explaining various aspects of consumer safety.



She explained the concept of consumer safety and dwelt on the consumers' rights to safe products and safe services.

Each of the presentations were marked by very lively floor discussions where the students took active part.

Finally a debate was organised on the topic "In Today's World of Advertisements, We are More

Confused than Informed". A total of sixteen participants from eight eminent schools of Kolkata participated and spoke brilliantly on the subject.

The debate was very intense, compelling spontaneous applause time and again from the very receptive audience. Prizes were announced for the two best speakers, both for and against.

Feedback

Is It Really Safe?

Quality Publication

We acknowledge with thanks receipt of your publication "Is It Really Safe?", sent to us as a complimentary copy.

Appreciating your thoughtful gesture we congratulate you for bringing out such quality educative books, which goes a long way in serving consumer education.

*General Secretary
Akhil Bharatiya Grahak Panchayat
Mysore*

Widely Acclaimed Publication

You had written about 'The Great Indian Iodised Salt Debate', 'Drinking Milk or White Poison', and 'How Safe is your Edible Oil'. All these were published in Gurgaon in Grahak Sahayak Newsletter and was widely acclaimed.

The press release 'CUTS Safety Watch Urges National Building Code to be Made Mandatory' is being published in our souvenir celebrating 10 years of Grahak Sahayak, Gurgaon.

*Col. H. N. Handa, Emeritus Facilitator
Grahak Sahayak
Gurgaon, Hariyana*

Campaign on Sec. 134 of Motor Vehicles Act, 1988

Unique Campaign

The campaign on Section 134 of Motor Vehicles Act is a unique one. This should be popularised through various media. This can be popularised if the Doctors at large and their organisation i.e., IMA could be made aware about the implication of the Section.

We shall take appropriate steps to popularise this Section in the remote places as well as among the members of the IMA in the district and sub-divisional level.

*Samir Banerjee, Secretary
Organisation for Protection of Environment
& Consumers, Birbhum, West Bengal*

BEWARE

Informative Newsletter

Received your newsletters 3/2004 and 4/2004. It is really informative and enriching. Consumer activists will get more impetus from those.

*Secretary
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North 24-Parganas, West Bengal*

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SOURCES

DTE: Down to Earth, TH: The Hindu, TOI: Times of India, RP: Rajasthan Patrika, BL: Business Line, BS: Business Standard, ET: Economic Times, FE: Financial Express.

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