



*European Communities  
Commission  
Press Release*

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COMMUNITY'S FIRST CONSUMER PROTECTION POLICY

Council Adopts Programme

The Council of Ministers today adopted the first EEC programme specifically aimed at helping the consumer. The "Preliminary Programme for Consumer Protection and Information" which lays down the principles and priorities for action over a very wide field of consumer concern, will be the basis for detailed proposals over the coming months.

The aim is to ensure that every consumer and user of products and services has value for money; is protected against health and safety risks; is free to exercise proper choice on the basis of clear information rather than a plethora of misleading, confusing or useless publicity; has redress in the event of defective, harmful or unsatisfactory products or services; is protected against unfair conditions of sales credit or hire purchase. Generally it seeks to ensure that marketing, packaging and other aspects of sales presentation do not harm the consumer's interests or the environment.

The programme, worked out over the past two years since the Paris Summit of 1972 called for a consumer policy (along with social, regional and environmental policies), will intensify or initiate actions in the main areas :

Health and safety protection : by defining standards for the composition of food products (for example by thorough lists of permitted additives); for safety standards for products containing toxic, inflammable explosive or corrosive substances (in cosmetics, detergents, medicines, household goods); and applying safety standards for electrical goods, automobiles etc. (+)

Elimination of unfair or misleading commercial practices : Priorities here are action against false and deceptive publicity (through the definition of what constitutes misleading publicity and penalties for infringement); enforcement of rules for unambiguous statement of the conditions of hire purchase or consumer credits (for example, the clear indication of total cost and real interest rate); protection against unfairness in guarantee conditions, door-to-door sales, premium offers, etc.

Application of rules for labelling of all products to ensure that the nature, composition, weight and volume, food value (in the case of packaged foodstuffs, the date of manufacture) and thus price per weight unit are clearly marked. (+)

Provision of legal advice and redress for consumers through the setting up of claims and advice services (here the Commission will study all those facilities existing in the Member States and the possibilities for improvement).

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(+) These are activities on which the EEC has been engaged for some years and where considerable progress has been made. This programme puts the efforts clearly into the field of consumer protection.

Information to consumers : the aim will be to alert the public and give further encouragement to consumer organisations; and alongside this, to conduct surveys that will clarify the nature of the deal consumers get in the light of differing conditions throughout the EEC. Here, price differentials are an important subject of study.

Throughout this process consumer groups will be fully represented by the 25-man Consultative Committee (on which the UK Consumer's Association sits).

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