



INFO-C

Information from the Consumer Policy Service of the European Commission - Vol. IV, No 4, 1994

“Back to School” Time!

By the time this issue of **INFO-C** reaches our readers, most will have returned to their desks after the summer holidays. We hope you have been relaxing and that the occasional heat wave helped to renew your sources of energy, so that you are able to look forward to new challenges.

The “back to school” atmosphere which marks this time of year is, of course, the ideal time to announce the second “**European Young Consumer of the Year**” competition which, we hope, will attract an even larger number of competing groups than the first one.

Another very important date for your diaries is the first meeting of the **European Consumer Forum**, whose inaugural session will take place in Brussels on 4 October 1994.

However, somewhat unusually, we would like to draw your attention to the fact that this issue represents a milestone in the development of **INFO-C** as it marks a significant change in the editorial staff.

Firstly, Diane LUQUISE takes her leave of the editorial team because she has completed the maximum time permitted for external personnel. Diane was recruited by the Consumer Policy Service in November 1990, and was specifically charged with giving practical form to the idea of producing an information newsletter for relay organisations and others interested in consumer policy in the European Community. After contributing to the development of the initial layout, for a long time she was alone in handling the editorial work. She also deserves much of the credit for establishing relations with sources of information both inside Community institutions and with organisations in Member States.

Diane will be missed not only by her colleagues in the Consumer Information and Education Unit, but also by all the people working in the Consumer Policy Service. We are very grateful for all the work she has done to establish **INFO-C** as an essential tool for disseminating information on EC consumer policy, and we hope that her qualifications and experience will soon find a new challenge.

The new Editor is Nicolas GENEVAY, whose qualifications in both economics and literature are complemented by experience in marketing and education. This somewhat unusual combination of qualities, in our opinion, makes him an ideal person to continue the development of **INFO-C**.

INFO-C

Two-monthly periodical
 Editors : Jens Ring
 Diane Luquiser
 European Commission
 Consumer Policy Service
 rue de la Loi 200
 B - 1049 Bruxelles
 Tel.: +32/2/295.70.80
 Fax : +32/2/296.32.79
 Date : texts finalised 1/8/94
 ISSN N° 1018 - 5755

POINTS OF INTEREST

German Presidency	2
European Young Consumer Competition	3
Consumer Protection in Finland	5
COLINE: Consumer Line	8
Consumer Television Group	9
Inventory of Consumer Acts	10
Food Additives	10
News from the Member States	17
Publications and Audiovisuals	20
Diary	23

GERMAN PRESIDENCY: CONSUMER PROTECTION POLICY DURING THE GERMAN PRESIDENCY

The Federal Economics Minister will preside at Council meetings dealing with consumer affairs. He will be represented by Secretary of State Professor Johann EEKHOFF.

Bearing in mind the political objective enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty of ensuring a high level of consumer protection in the Community, and taking into consideration the principle of subsidiarity, Secretary of State EEKHOFF is keen to ensure continuity in Community consumer policy following the Greek Presidency and will therefore give priority in particular to the following dossiers:

TIMESHARE DIRECTIVE

There is no majority in the Council for accepting the amendments proposed by the European Parliament. Hence the Presidency must forthwith initiate the conciliation procedure provided for in Article 189b of the Treaty and come to a successful conclusion in cooperation with the Council and Parliament. Our objective is to have this Directive adopted during the German Presidency.

EHLASS - CREATION OF A COMMUNITY INFORMATION SYSTEM ON HOME AND LEISURE ACCIDENTS

Once the European Parliament has delivered its opinion on the proposed decision, it will be submitted to the Council for final adoption.

TRANSPARENCY AND EFFICIENCY OF CROSS-BORDER PAYMENTS

The Commission's objective of accelerating cross-border payments and reducing their costs for consumers is backed by the Presidency. This is not only in the interests of consumers but also of small and medium-sized firms. The Presidency will also support the Commission in its priority objective of establishing a kind of "charter"

so as to make payments more transparent and easier to calculate for consumers.

The main thing to be done is to intensify competition between institutes involved in cross-border payments. To this end the Community must issue a clear political signal, through cooperation between the Commission and the Council.

GUARANTEES FOR CONSUMER GOODS AND AFTER-SALES SERVICES AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR CONSUMERS

The Commission has produced Green Papers on these consumer issues, which analyze the problems facing consumers and suggest a number of solutions. The Commission has thus triggered a lively debate in the business and consumer circles concerned. As a follow-up to this debate the Commission is organising a forum in October, whose findings the Commission will subsequently evaluate. The German Presidency supports this procedure. The outcome should be presented in detail to the Council and discussed there.

LABELLING IN THE INTEREST OF THE CONSUMER

Following the Council Resolution of 5 April 1993 on future action on the labelling of products in the interest of the consumer, a number of preliminary studies at the Commission indicate that this domain is not suitable for horizontal regulation. The German Presidency welcomes the idea of voluntary labelling systems with the involvement of all interested circles, which the Commission would like to encourage. The German Presidency wants a detailed presentation of the results of preliminary studies and pilot projects in the Council.

DIRECTIVE ON COMPARATIVE AND MISLEADING ADVERTISING

The Commission's amended proposal will have to be scrutinised in detail during the German Presidency, leading to a general policy debate within the Council.

DISTANCE-SELLING DIRECTIVE

The Greek Presidency did a lot of groundwork on this very intricate issue, which is characterised by an abundance of difficult problems and by opposing viewpoints between the Member States both as regards the need for and substance of the proposal. This preliminary work singled out a number of possible approaches. However, some of the above-mentioned problems need to be further discussed. The German Presidency intends to

continue the work with a view to further clarification, initially at Coreper level. We should not underestimate the outstanding difficulties.

Secretary of State EEKHOFF considers that a lot more preliminary work will have to be done before this dossier is ready for a common position by the Council. We will have to await the outcome of this preliminary work before we can decide whether it is meaningful for the Council to discuss the proposal during the German Presidency.



The finals of the first **Young European Consumer Competition** were held on 24 May 1994 in Brussels in the presence of Christiane SCRIVENER, European Commissioner responsible mainly for consumer policy (see **INFO-C** No 9/93).

The competition was organised by the European Interregional Institute for Consumer Affairs (EIICA) with the backing of the European Commission (Consumer Policy Service).

The objective of the competition was to encourage young people to reflect on their own behaviour and motivate them to become more critical consumers.

On this subject Christiane SCRIVENER said that "young consumers are often unaware of their rights and obligations, and all too often do not yet have the skills and dis-

cernment necessary to evaluate the products on offer. They risk being an easy and vulnerable target of seductive advertising messages. This is why I proposed this competition, which should encourage young people to reflect on their own behaviour and motivate them to become more critical consumers".

The topic of this first competition was "*How to choose a product*". Young people were free to tackle this theme from a multitude of angles - price, quality, labelling, safety, environmental impact, durability and so on. The products to be studied were generally those purchased or used by young people (clothing, compact disks, sport articles, etc.).

Specifically, the participants were required to prepare an information package on the proposed topic, in any form they liked - exhibition, magazine, play, brochure, etc.

Consumer Protection

The work was to be targeted at other young people in order to influence their behaviour as consumers.

More than 300 groups of ten- to fourteen-year-old schoolchildren throughout the 12 Member States participated in this competition.

Each of the 12 national juries selected a team to participate in the European finals.

Below is a list of the national groups selected to participate in the finals, indicating the topic they chose and the material they presented (in alphabetical order by country):

Belgium

Group: l'Athenée Ernest Solvay, Charleroi
Topic: White paper versus recycled paper
Material: Theatre - Sketch - Dramatised trial

Denmark

Group: Bankagerskolen, Horsens
Topic: Choosing eggs with an eye to the conditions in which chickens are kept
Material: Exhibition of posters and photos

France

Group: Ecole élémentaire Richard Wagner, Lille
Topic: How to purchase a bicycle
Material: Book - shopping guide. Slide show (in colour)

Germany

Group: Integrierte Gesamtschule, Oldenburg
Topic: Choosing a drink (cola/fruit juice)
Material: Video (three-to-four-minute advertising spot) – booklet/slides.

Greece

Group: 1st Junior High School, Halandri, Athens
Topic: How to choose a product (wide choice of products)
Material: Video and posters

Ireland

Group: Holy Faith De La Salle Convent, Skerries, Co. Dublin
Topic: How to choose a product (price, quality, safety, warranty, after-sales service, labelling, durability)
Material: Rap dance

Italy

Group: F. Filizi Scuola Media, Bolzano
Topic: Nutrition
Material: School magazine

Luxembourg

Group: Lycée Technique Agricole d'Ettelbruck
Topic: How to eat properly
Material: Three panels:
– salty versus sweet
– foodstuffs choice
– pocket money and young people's food choices

Netherlands

Group: R.K. School voor VBO Skavel, Amsterdam
Topic: How to choose a product
Material: Video and eight panels

Portugal

Group: Escola C+S de Cabeceiras de Bastos, Minho
Topic: Picnic (quality, labelling, choice of food, advertising)
Material: Video, animated poster and song

Spain

Group: CP San Anton de El Pinos, Alicante
Topic: How to choose shoes (survey, manufacture, choice, etc.)
Material: 20 minute video, condensed to 8 minutes

United Kingdom

Group: Ardrossan Academy, Ayrshire, Scotland
Topic: How to choose what you buy
Material: Video, book and song

The first prize went to the class of the Holy Faith de la Salle Convent in Skerries (Co. Dublin), and their teacher Ann DINEEN. Blending rap music, dance routines and lyrics composed by the class, the team's five representatives Aileen, Jane, Aoife, Deidre and Miriam showed how quality, durability, safety, labelling and after-sales service are the features that well-informed consumers look out for.

The second and third prizes went respectively to the Ardrossan Academy, Ayrshire (United Kingdom), and teacher James WILLETTS, and the class of the Integrierte Gesamtschule in Oldenburg (Germany), represented by Ortrud REUTER-KAMINSKY. The UK team had prepared a video clip advising young people on the use of symbols, packaging and prices; it also explained what to do if the product purchased is defective.

The German team had prepared an advertising spot, games and surveys, combined in book form, to inform young people about non-alcoholic drinks.

The good news is that the *Euronews* chain has already used the rap music created by the Irish winning team, entitled "*How to choose which product to buy*". This music was the theme of the credits of a pilot series of programmes on consumer protection which was broadcast,

with financial assistance from the CPS, several times a day from 27 June to 3 July 1994.

The creation of a video clip based on the entry, which was offered to the winning team, meant that the message could be broadcast widely. Not bad for a start!

To conclude, let us once more quote the Commissioner's words congratulating the winners: "I am thrilled at the enthusiasm and creativity the participants have shown on the occasion of this first competition. The best entries are an effective medium for relaying the European message on consumer information to young people. The initiative is an example of what the Commission can achieve in the field of consumer education, by involving national authorities and organisations responsible for consumer protection."

Contact:

Mireille LEROY
IEIC
47 rue Barthélémy Delespaul
F-59000 Lille
Tel: +33/20.60.69.10
Fax: +33/20.54.18.45

CONSUMER PROTECTION AND POLICY ADMINISTRATION IN FINLAND

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Consumer protection relating to goods - consumer products, including foodstuffs - has made vast strides in Finland in recent years, notably with an eye to the European integration process. In addition to foodstuffs, product standards have been imposed on cosmetics, detergents, toys, fire safety for various kinds of furniture, formaldehyde content in textiles, etc.

The body of legislation includes:

- The **Foodstuffs Act** (1941) protecting consumers against health hazards and economic losses caused by foodstuffs due to misrepresentation.

- The **Product Safety Act** (1989) providing corresponding protection against dangers posed by non-food consumer goods to consumers and their property.
- The **Consumer Protection Act** (1978) protecting consumers against defective goods once purchased. In compensation for the defective article consumers may require either a non-faulty replacement, a price reduction or cancellation of the contract.
- The **Product Liability Act** (1990) granting consumers an indemnity if the goods purchased by them harm their health or property.

If the protection relating to goods is generally satisfactory, the situation for consumer services in Finland is similar to

that in the European Union, i.e. far less developed. This is mainly due to the heterogeneous and variable nature of consumer services which makes them difficult to regulate. Although the Consumer Complaints Board (see below) issues recommendations for the settlement of complaints even in the case of defective services, material legislation concerning services has yet to be enacted. Consumer policy-makers in Finland believe, however, that improvement of consumer protection in the area of consumer services is one of the great challenges for consumer policy in the 1990s. Clear regulations are needed to be able to decide for a specific service (a) when it can be deemed **defective**, (b) when it can be deemed **dangerous** to the consumer (safety of service), and (c) how **compensation** is to be arranged in the event of its harming the consumer's health or property (in other words liability for services).

Preparatory work for legislation on consumer services includes:

- A proposal to incorporate provisions on certain consumer services, such as repair and maintenance, into the Consumer Protection Act. The act would specify when a service must be regarded as faulty, and would lay down sanctions for the defect as well as for delays in the supply of the service. Furthermore, the act would include provisions on some specific problems relating to service contracts, e.g. suppliers carrying out work not provided for in the contract (more service or repairs done to your car than agreed with the garage), the role of price estimates, or the supplier's obligation to let the consumer know in advance if he has to pay a lot more for the service than he can reasonably expect.

Finally, the act would incorporate provisions relating to building contracts.

- Extension of the Product Safety Act, through an amendment applicable from the beginning of November 1993, to consumer services. Under this amendment, both a service involving hazards and the use of goods involved in providing the service can be prohibited.

A survey has been made to identify service areas where hazards might occur. Areas such as physical exercise, beauty care and entertainment were suggested: slides and sledge runs, slalom cableway services, solariums, slimming treatments, certain physio-therapeutic treatments, hairdressers' services.

- Specific legislation on service liability, e.g. an act on damages for injuries incurred by patients (the Product Safety Act governs only damages for injury or harm caused by products).

CONSUMER POLICY ADMINISTRATION

Consumer policy administration in Finland in its present form was established in June 1990. Consumer affairs come within the remit of the Ministry of Trade and Industry. The main tasks are: development of relevant legislation (in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice), international cooperation in consumer affairs, contacts with the various advisory committees or councils dealing with consumer affairs and product safety, and political issues pertaining to the different bodies and institutions under the Ministry. Beneath Ministerial level there are several enforcement agencies:

- *The National Consumer Administration* is responsible for supervising product safety, disseminating consumer information, consumer education, organising municipal consumer counselling, price comparisons and price surveys. It also has a number of supervisory duties. It employs 70 persons.
- *The National Consumer Research Centre* is responsible for research on consumption and other aspects of running domestic households, consumer durables, the consumer's position and impact of consumption. The number of employees is 20.
- *The National Food Administration* is in charge of food control. The aim is to preclude health risks and hazards from foodstuffs, to ensure the high quality of foodstuffs, and to prevent consumers from being misled and from incurring economic loss on that account. The number of employees is 21 persons.
- The *Consumer Complaints Board* deals with complaints from consumers about the quality of consumer products they have acquired or services supplied by entrepreneurs. It also submits to the courts opinions relating to consumer goods.
- The *Consumer Ombudsman* supervises the legality of marketing and contract terms. The *Ombudsman* may also assist the consumer in proceedings relating to a contract on given consumer goods, if the Board's recommendation for settling a dispute has not been complied with or if such a course of action is important for the application of law or in the public interest. These agencies employ a total of 40 persons.
- The *Market Court* acts as a specialised court within its jurisdiction under the Consumer Protection Act in the field of marketing and contractual regulation or under the Act on Unfair Business Practices. In conjunction with the Ministry of Trade and Industry there

is an *Advisory Council on Consumer Affairs (ACCA)* for coordination of and consultation on consumer affairs. The Chairman of the ACCA is the Minister responsible for consumer affairs and members include representatives of political parties and the social partners as well as the public administration. The ACCA published a Consumer Policy Programme in 1991.

Regional government is responsible for a variety of practical tasks in the field of consumer affairs.

Monitoring of product safety and, under the Food Act, foodstuffs hygiene in municipalities is the task of the Local Health Boards.

Municipal consumer counselling is another service provided to citizens at local level. Since 1992 all municipalities (460 in Finland altogether) have been obliged to organise it singly or together with other municipalities. Counselling is provided free of charge to residents. The

costs are paid partly from municipal and partly from State funds. As regards counselling, residents of the municipality are given general consumer education, individual advice at specific times and assistance in disputes with manufacturers or retailers.

There are two consumer organisations operating in Finland, both partly subsidised by the State: The Finnish Consumers' Association (*Suomen Kuluttajaliitto*) and Consumer Association (*Kuluttajat-Konsumenterna*), FLA/SK has local associations throughout the country.

For further information:

Kristian TAMMIVUORI
Government Counsellor
Ministry of Trade and Industry
Aleksanterinkatu 4
SF-00170 Helsinki
Tel: +358/0/1601
Fax: +358/0/160.3666

CONSUMER LINE:

A Response in Real Time!

COLINE (or: CONsumer LINE), the first multilateral trans-European network for consumers, is born!

Inaugurated officially on 19 May 1994 by Christiane SCRIVENER, Commissioner responsible mainly for consumer affairs, COLINE is a decentralised network linking in its pilot phase five information centres situated in Barcelona, Dusseldorf, Lille, Lisbon and Luxembourg.

These centres, which are already working in the field of consumer affairs, all have databases on Community and national consumer law.

But COLINE's leading-edge feature is that by pooling all information of potential relevance to protecting consumer rights in a network all problems can practically be handled in real time.

This initiative is a response to long-standing consumer appeals for information on how they can rely on their rights both at home and abroad within the European Union. Two important perceptions underlie this initiative:

- the opening of the large markets since 1993 has been accompanied by a growing trade in goods and services,
- this increased trade has not always been accompanied by all the information necessary for strengthening consumer confidence in products and services purchased abroad.

This led the Commission to identify a certain number of questions that concern consumers.

Finally, consumers had to be informed about their rights and the advantages of relying on the single market and this information had to be disseminated in an immediately useable form.

The Commission's reaction might have been to propose a European consumer agency or centralised information bodies. But this would not have been in tune with the Community's vocation, which is called on to come ever closer to its citizens, under the subsidiarity principle.

Hence the Commission consulted all organisations experienced in dealing with consumers and selected those interested in joint action in this domain by providing in-depth information on legal issues and communications expertise.

In order to establish a streamlined mechanism, it was decided to set up a network of computerised databases backed up by advisory centres.

A federal-type structure was established by creating a tool involving shared working methods, relying on local initiatives at Member State level.

How does the system work in practice?

Let's take the example of an intending holiday-maker who wants to learn about the rules in force in the country of his destination in the field of, say, finance or warranties. He consults the centre closest to his home, maybe even on line.

The centre processes his request, interrogates the network centre situated in the Member State concerned, which sends the information via the COLINE network. The centre near the consumer then answers his question. This example concerns information prior to a purchase. But obviously the network is also useful in the event of transfrontier disputes, where consumers are often at a disadvantage.

The databases are continuously updated, not only in the event of changes in statutes and regulations, but also to keep abreast of developments in case law.

Currently extensions of the content of these bases are under study and should be realised shortly. These additions will concern not only the resolution of disputes but also simple questions that consumers want to clarify before concluding an agreement or if they have doubts or want to check out something.

If the first phase is successful we have every reason to believe that the entire Community will soon be covered. Moreover the members of the European Economic Area have also expressed their interest in joining an expanded network.

To conclude, let us quote the Commissioner's words: "The really original aspect of this initiative is the method used to realise the COLINE project. The Commission provided the impetus and helped design and coordinate the project, while leaving the operational centres a wide degree of freedom. **This should help ensure the rapid success of this network at the service of European consumers**".

Contacts:

Agencia Europea de Información sobre el Consumo
Gra Via Carles III, 105 lletra 1
E-08028 Barcelona
Tel: +34/3/33.09.812
Fax: +34/3/33.09.311

Verbraucher-Zentrale
Mintropstraße 27
D-4000 Dusseldorf
Tel: +49/211.38.09.139
Fax: +49/211.38.09.172

Centre Régional de la Consommation
rue Barthélémy Delespaul 47bis
F-59000 Lille
Tel: +33/20.60.60.60
Fax: +33/30.42.09.31

Instituto do Consumidor
Praça Duque de Saldanha 31
P-1000 Lisboa
Tel: +351/1/54.40.25
Fax: +351/1/52.24.10

Union Luxembourgeoise des Consommateurs
rue des Bruyères 55
L-1274 Howald
Tel: +352/49.60.22
Fax: +352/49.49.57

Mercedes DE SOLA
European Commission
Consumer Policy Service
rue de la Loi 200
J70 7/18
B-1049 Brussels
Tel: +32/2/295.62.72
Fax: +32/2/296.32.79

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE CONSUMER TELEVISION GROUP

Following an invitation from the consumer affairs department of the autonomous government of Castilla-La-Mancha (Spain), the annual forum for producers of TV consumer programmes was held in Toledo on 9-10 June. The participation of representatives from 21 television stations in nine countries provided the most extensive collection of programmes yet seen in this group.

On the first day, after an introduction by Ken ROBERTS (CPS), the European Institute for the Media presented the findings of a study which the Institute has been preparing (at the request of CPS) on the state of consumer broadcasts in Europe. The study emphasises the difficulty in defining what exactly qualifies as a programme which imparts information to the consumer and then proceeds to categorise the programmes studied (there were 93 in all) in a number of ways (type of programme, length, target audience, time of transmission, etc.). Friday 10 June was devoted to the participants' showing examples of their programmes. In addition to the regular contributors to the meeting, there was an interesting range of new programmes which had not been seen at previous meetings of the group.

As part of the more general discussions, participants indicated that they would like to engage in dialogue with consumers' organisations in order to improve the consumer input to their programmes, something which already exists at several TV stations. As a direct result, it was decided that the Commission will initiate an exchange of information, consisting of a regular newsletter containing a list of all the subjects covered by participants in their programmes. This should ensure a greater awareness of what problems are being encountered elsewhere in Europe, and allow for bilateral contacts to be made on subjects which are of interest in more than one country.

Contact:

Paul McGARRY
Consumer Policy Service
rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 Brussels
Tel: +32/2/295.75.06
Fax: +32/2/296.32.79

ACTS RELATING TO CONSUMER AFFAIRS

"The inventory of Community acts relating to consumer affairs" published by the Consumer Policy Service, mentioned already in **INFO-C** No 9/93, is one of the most useful tools available for people working in this domain. Its popularity is growing and the document is now available in another language – Spanish – over and above the three existing versions (French, English and German).

Readers should note that this inventory is distributed via a mailing list and that errors may occasionally occur. If you have not received your copy by end August, please contact the address below:

Contact:

J. DOUDARD
Consumer Policy Service
European Commission
rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 Brussels
Tel: +32/2/295.34.91
Fax: +32/2/296.32.79

FOOD ADDITIVES

On 16 June 1994 the Council of Ministers finally adopted three directives¹ concerning food additives.

The first two directives harmonise national legislation concerning the use of artificial sweeteners in foodstuffs. The third directive establishes positive lists and lays down the conditions for use of colours in foodstuffs.

This concludes a very intense discussion involving all European institutions. The negotiations, which have taken more than three years, also involved consumer associations at both European and national levels.

All colours and sweeteners have been evaluated by the EU's Scientific Committee for Food, and have been found acceptable for use in food for human consumption. The Directives establish the list of sweeteners and

colours which may be used, excluding all other substances. Furthermore, for a whole series of food additives, maximum levels of use in foodstuffs were established in order to guarantee that acceptable daily intakes fixed by the Scientific Committee for Food are not exceeded. The Directive on colours also establishes a list of basic foodstuffs in which the use of these colours will be totally prohibited. Such foodstuffs include honey, milk, tea, oil, fruit and vegetable preserves, etc.

The Directives further require that Member States actively monitor the consumption of food additives. This surveillance system and data obtained through it will be drawn on for future adaptations of European food additives legislation in order better to protect the consumer from excessive intake of certain additives.

The European Union, having harmonised the use of sweeteners and colours in foodstuffs, also allows Member States to grant exemptions in order to maintain the traditional character of specific foodstuffs. Indeed Member States are now also permitted to maintain, under certain conditions, national legislation prohibiting the use of certain additives in traditional foodstuffs.

A further Directive on all other food additives will be adopted before the end of 1994 and will complete the harmonisation exercise in the European Union.

Contact:

Willem PENNING
European Commission
DG III
rue de la Loi 200
N-9 2/22
B-1049 Brussels
Tel: +32/2/296.27.04
Fax: +32/2/296.11.25

EMU INFO

Economic and monetary union (EMU) is now an objective enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty. The goal is to establish a single currency, the ecu. For consumers, this currency - which will no longer be subject to fluctuations

¹ Traditional foodstuffs and artificial sweeteners - COM(92) 255; artificial colouring - COM(91) 444.

in exchange rates throughout the European Union - has a lot to offer, above all when shopping abroad. A study carried out by the BEUC (European Office of Consumer Unions) has highlighted the considerable losses resulting from these fluctuations.¹ The ecu also has other advantages for consumers, such as an end to exchange rate commissions and better information on prices in the other Member States. But realising economic and monetary union is an uphill struggle all the way. The first phase began on 1 July 1990 and mainly involved the total liberation of capital movements. The second phase began on 1 January 1994 with the establishment of the European Monetary Institute. The third and final phase will end with the introduction of the ecu as a regular currency, planned for 1999.

The European Commission is aware that many people may find it hard to grasp the practical significance of the move towards a single currency given the way things stand at present. Everybody is concerned and should have the opportunity to learn more, to adapt and prepare themselves.

For this reason the European Commission has created contact points whose addresses are given below and which are linked to the services of Directorate-General II "Economic and Financial Affairs", which can provide regular information on progress towards EMU:

Contact points:

Nikolaus ADAMI
European Commission
DG II
BU1-1/2
rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 Bruxelles
Tel.: +32/2/299.44.19
Fax: +32/2/299.35.78

Marlène RUSESCU
European Commission
DG II
BU1 00/113
rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 Bruxelles
Tel: +32/2/299.90.15
Fax: +32/2/296.94.28

COMPARATIVE PRODUCT TESTING IN EUROPE

A second seminar on comparative product testing (CPT) in Europe, was held in Berlin 14-15 April this year under the auspices of *Stiftung Warentest* of Germany and *International Testing*, the main organisation for cooperation in this field (for the background see our coverage of the first seminar in **INFO-C** No 7).

The seminar followed up the exploration of the various phases of CPT with a view to identifying and debating different approaches. It also covered a number of new themes increasingly relevant to CPT.

Among these were the growing importance of environmental parameters, the relationship between CPT and standardisation, the opportunities for cooperation between established CPT-organisations in Western Europe and emerging organisations in Eastern Europe and Russia, and finally new approaches to solving a classical problem in CPT: how to ensure that the products tested are actually the products found in shops when the test results are published.

The following two texts touch upon the first two of these points:

- the conditions for obtaining the Dutch ecological label "*Milieukeur*" for television sets;
- a brief history of the interplay between CPT and standardisation in the Nordic countries.

In the next issue we shall cover:

- the first joint East-West test: a massive durability test of washing machines conducted by *Stiftung Warentest* and its Russian counterpart;
- "Shelf life", the radical reform of test procedures carried out by the Consumers Association of the UK.

Milieukeur Television Sets

The "*Stichting Milieukeur*" has stipulated the conditions for granting the *Milieukeur* for television sets.

The *Milieukeur* is awarded on request to producers and importers of television sets provided their products satisfy the conditions.

¹ *L'argent des vacances* - June 1992, BEUC study.

The environmental requirements are based upon life-cycle research, i.e. the product group is analyzed "from the cradle to the grave".

Research shows that it makes environmental sense to set standards for the energy consumption of television sets, both in use and in stand-by mode. Furthermore, requirements have been set for chlorine, bromide, cadmium, antimony, and mercury content in synthetic components.

No bromide or chlorine-containing fire retardants may normally be used in the printing plates, if there are alternatives. Neither may these plates be cleansed with (H)CFCs (in the production process).

No cadmium may be added to the cathode ray tube powder.

Recyclability of the television set cabinet is promoted by not permitting the use of hard-to-remove binding elements, non-reusable synthetic materials or paint layers that impede reusability.

If the set includes many copper and aluminium components, a set percentage of these parts must be made of secondary materials and a large portion (90%) must be properly re-used.

The *Milieukeur* requirements dovetail with international standards ensuring that the TV set is safe and has a good image and sound quality.

Likewise, standards have been set for the packaging, warrantee (minimum one year), the paper used in the instruction manual (bleached without chlorine-containing chemicals), coding of synthetics and the visibility of the on/off switch for the stand-by function.

"Private" environmental logos are not permitted in conjunction with the *Milieukeur*.

Any manufacturer who obtains the *Milieukeur* is required to provide consumers with product information aiming to avoid, whenever possible, the use of the stand-by function and also to ensure proper dismantling of the set.

All requirements have been formalised in a so-called certification schedule. In three years time a decision will be taken to decide whether these requirements need to be modified in the light of developments.

Standardisation and Comparative Testing

Historically the inhabitants of the Nordic countries made their living from agriculture and fisheries. A hundred years ago 80% of the population lived in the countryside and were self-sufficient. Slowly people moved into towns and cities. By the middle of this century there were sufficient numbers of urban households to justify the take-off of consumer information. Consumer policy pioneers began to test various kinds of industrial food products and compared quality and price with home-made equivalents.

From food the step was short to tools and domestic appliances. All kinds of kitchen appliances were tested. Not only were the products on the market tested, but investigations were also made in order to find out how to improve various articles. Research was done into measurements suitable to give good grip, easy handling and efficient performance. The results were published in reports, which were made available to manufacturers. These findings were indeed often used to establish standards for suitable design of such items as cutlery or gardening tools.

These studies expanded to encompass the home, kitchens, and laundries. The optimal design of working surfaces, storage space, white goods, etc. was studied, in tandem with function, by observing a panel of people actually working in these rooms. On this basis standards for layout and installation of these rooms were developed, which greatly influenced housing construction in the 1960s.

The 1950s saw a boom in the manufacture and use of white goods and other appliances in the home. The Swedish scientist A. HOROWITZ launched comparative tests of washing machines. In those days competing technologies were offered: cylinder, pulsator and agitator. Horowitz established the superiority of the cylinder machines. His testing methods were published, enabling manufacturers to enhance this technology even further.

Eventually the Horowitz test methods were standardized and became the canon. The parameters for a reference washing machine were established in 1962 as was the evaluation scale for cleaning performance, both of which are still used.

The proliferation of mass-produced goods made an increase in public information indispensable. Standardised labelling systems were launched during the 1950s and became ubiquitous in the 1960s.

The systems worked well for food products. Labels included information on nutrient and raw materials content and were so reliable that comparative testing became superfluous in this area. The labelling system also worked well for clothes and other textiles, household chemicals and small domestic appliances. The foundation for standardised label information was reproducible test methods. These were agreed upon between the interested parties within the standards organisation. The consumer representatives contributed with their experiences from comparative testing. They also took care that the final methods really favoured good products.

This labelling system has survived until today only in Denmark.¹ In Sweden a parallel system was established just for furniture, which is working mainly because it is used by IKEA. The main reasons for abolishing it were:

- only manufacturers with very good products were ready to pay for the label;
- developing test methods became too expensive for complicated products;
- the system was not suitable for handling safety aspects.

This brings us to the events of the 1970s. By then rules on the advertising and marketing of consumer goods and services were on the statute books. These instruments normally included clauses outlawing products jeopardising user health and safety, such as the EU General Product Safety Directive. Thus, it became urgent to define what was meant by an unsafe product.

Work started with items for children not normally covered by other regulations. Protective equipment like helmets and life jackets were next. Test methods were developed, tried, modified, used and honed until they were good enough to filter out unsafe models. The approach to protective equipment was to find the optimal compromise between safety, comfort and appearance. Equipment providing the best possible protection is worthless if it is not used because it is too heavy or ugly. Again, as far as possible, the methods were eventually transformed into standards, both national and for the all Nordic countries, which made them more easily acceptable to local and foreign manufacturers. The results were positive: fewer accidents involving children.

¹ Cfr. coverage of the Varefakta system in **INFO-C** Nos 7 and 8.

Current standardisation issues are beyond the scope of this article. But in conclusion it might be stated that the "Nordic approach" of combining information based on CPT with negotiation with manufacturers and retailers leading to some sort of regulation has definitely benefited the whole population: the informed citizen can choose the best products right away; and the regulatory elements mean that inferior products are weeded out, leaving weaker and uninformed consumers better off.

For more information:

Inger NORSTEDT
Testlab
 Konsumentverket
 Sorterargatan 26 Box 503
 S-16215 Vällingby
 Tel: +46/8/759.83.00
 Fax: +46/8/38.70.55

Stichting Milieukeur
 Eisenhowerlaan 150
 NL-2517 KP Den Haag
 Tel: +31/70/358.63.00
 Fax: +31/70/350.25.17

CONSUMER TESTS IN EASTERN EUROPEAN TEST CENTRES

The leading consumer test organisations in Western Europe, which include the *Stiftung Warentest* in Germany, are faced with a dilemma in that, although the actual tests are becoming no less arduous or expensive, the results are evidently becoming less and less interesting the more product quality tends to even out at a high level. This is of course fine for the consumer – thanks to a great extent to the work of the test organisations – but the downside is that reader interest is declining, the test organisations' income is dwindling, and less and less money is available for future projects.

There are various ways in which we can counter this trend, and two of them will be looked at in greater detail in this article. One possibility is to cut costs by using cheaper test centres, but there are of course disadvantages in this approach if viewed in isolation. Another possibility is to take in criteria which are gaining in importance in the eyes of the consumer, but which have not been looked at hitherto for reasons of cost.

There are though, ways in which these two aspects can be combined now that the Iron Curtain has disappeared and access to the countries of Eastern Europe has become so much easier. In fact, many of these countries have highly qualified test centres which are in the throes of wholesale change and are looking for new work.

Simply commissioning tests from "low-wage countries" is not a wholly satisfactory approach as the loss of work in the test centres of Western Europe would serve only to create new problems. But if the steady growth in consumer awareness in Eastern Europe were to boost the demand for consumer information, an interesting synergy effect might be achieved by combining the dissemination of information to consumers faced with expanding and opening markets in those countries with the creation of new sources of income for the test centres.

Consumer test methods do not have to be reinvented – they can be learned by all manner of good examples. "Learning by doing" is undoubtedly a very good means of mastering this complex subject, especially if an organisation can find an experienced mentor who is prepared to help it avoid the usual learner errors. But the whole point of "learning by doing" is to carry out specific projects oneself. This might mean, say, doing work on contract for a foreign test organisation, which would involve first of all getting assistance from that organisation on how to tackle a project, and subsequently incorporating a number of items produced in the learner organisation's own country; at the final stage, the test method would be applied solely to goods from the organisation's own domestic market.

The advantage for the mentor organisation in Western Europe would be to use the lower-cost situation in the learner country to do tests which have so far been too costly.

To take a specific case, the *Stiftung Warentest* has long hankered after doing a full-scale life-cycle test on high-priced, long-life household articles, such as washing machines. For a highly complex device like a washing machine, there is no realistic way of compressing the machine's life cycle. The only option has been to keep on washing without a break, meaning a high input in terms of energy, water and especially labour (as it is virtually impossible to automate these operations).

In Western Europe, it would cost something like DM 800 000 (+/- ECU 400 000) to carry out a test on

this scale on an average range of something like 20 washing machines, assuming the test being done on three machines of each type, spread over a period of something like six months of non-stop washing to simulate a working life of some 12 years. Financially, this is virtually out of the question. In Russia, though, it would seem that the same kind of work can be done, under current conditions, a lot more cheaply. And there is no danger of the workers feeling that their low-wage status is being exploited. Indeed, they would be happy to be paid well to do a job which they see as important for their own future. The test results, which would be made available to firms producing in those countries, would help to improve the local situation and the range of products for local consumers. The ultimate result would be an improved infrastructure (including the energy aspect).

The first life-cycle test has now been completed, and the results are extremely interesting for the Western European products. One important finding was that most of the defects were systematic rather than random errors, which made the results very interesting for the Western European manufacturers. The defects themselves covered the entire range – from "zero" defects for all three examples of one particular product up to the total loss of all three examples of another one. In many cases, defects occurred at more or less the same time in the working life of the three machines. As a result, testers were able to award machines the full range of quality gradings, from "very good" to "very poor" without introducing any artificial elements to achieve a broader spread of gradings. So we managed to break the uniformity-of-results mould, the washing machine tests became far more interesting and a new criterion was introduced, to the benefit of consumers.

The whole operation took no work away from any test centre in Western Europe; it was made affordable by a combination of a low-cost structure and a high degree of interest on the part of the test centre in Eastern Europe, which "learned by doing" and got the opportunity to acquire expertise in an entirely new field.

Further information from:

Dr Peter SIEBER
Stiftung Warentest
Lützowplatz 11-13
D-10785 Berlin
Tel: +49/30/26.310
Fax: +49/30/26.31404

“EURO-C” PROPOSALS FOR REFOCUSING AND STRENGTHENING EUROPEAN CONSUMER PROTECTION POLICY

Every worker is also a consumer and user. For this reason the trade union movement has always taken an interest in consumer protection. EURO-C, the consumers' unit of the European Trade Union Confederation, is a concrete example.

The realisation of the internal market and the entry into effect of the Treaty on European Union have motivated ETUC/EURO-C to call for a **refocusing** and a **strengthening** of European consumer protection policy, incorporating the values of **solidarity**, **service** and **respect for the environment**.

Such a refocusing of European consumer protection policy, according to ETUC/EURO-C, is indispensable if the consumer is to have confidence in the internal market and in European construction.

To this end ETUC/EURO-C have advanced concrete proposals in their Newsletter of May 1994 (No 3), set out in its table of contents:

- a constitutional state also means access to justice for wronged consumers;
- towards a European policy on the quality and safety of food products;
- towards the adoption of a general directive on the liability of suppliers of services;
- towards a European directive on over-indebtedness;
- towards the refocusing and restabilisation of European consumer information policy, notably:
 - by adopting European directives guaranteeing better consumer information, for example specifying the information which must be provided at the place of sale and the mandatory display of the price of services;
 - greater resources and support for the “information service”, for example greater support for organisations responsible for comparative tests;

- providing more and better information for all consumers, for example by creating “consumer bureaux” in holiday resorts;
- towards the European regulation of financial services protecting the interests of consumers;
- towards the publication in 1994 of the Green Paper on the protection and promotion of consumer/user interests in public services;
- towards a positive definition of the subsidiarity principle;
- granting European consumer protection policy minimal budgetary resources.

For further information:

EURO-C

Confédération Européenne des Syndicats

Boulevard Emile Jacqmain 155

B-1210 Bruxelles

Tel: +32/2/224.05.40

Fax: +32/2/224.05.41

THE RAILWAYS AND DISADVANTAGED YOUNG CONSUMERS – A BIG STEP FORWARD

It is no secret that young people like to travel. But at what price? Aware of the importance of travel for young people, the International Union of Railways (IUR) had already, in April 1994, revamped the Interail Card, which allows young people aged under 26 to travel by rail in Europe at very favourable rates.

However, young consumers from particularly poor regions did not always benefit.

On 7 June 1994 the management board of the IUR met in Paris and the directors-general approved the creation of a **fund to encourage youth mobility**, designed to give young disadvantaged Europeans the opportunity to travel by train.

This initiative was the result of close collaboration between the IUR and the General Secretariat of the Council of Europe as well as the European Youth

Centre. It fully accommodates the repeated calls of the Conferences of Ministers of the Council of Europe to develop a spirit of encounter between young people in Europe and to promote the mobility of young people in the framework of cultural exchanges, by reducing obstacles of an economic and social order. It also responds to the expectations of national and international organisations that deal with youth problems.

This initiative also encourages young people to travel by train. The main beneficiaries are: young people from hard-hit regions, young people who have not had school support or a full education, young people from outlying regions who have to pay more to travel than young people in the centre of Europe, and young apprentices who do not have enough money to finance journeys that form part of their training.

How the Fund Works

The youth mobility fund will be financed mainly through annual payments corresponding to sales of Interail Cards from 1 January 1994. One ecu will be lodged for each Interail Card sold. These incomings will contribute

to financing the railway part of the journeys. A committee consisting of representatives of the IUR, the Interail Community and the Council of Europe will be responsible for monitoring expenditure.

Selection of Mobility Projects

The General Secretariat of the Council of Europe will call on approved associations of young people to submit examples of journeys which could be subsidised under this fund. After an initial selection of the projects by the Council of Europe, notably in the light of their education and cultural relevance, a final selection will be made by a group of representatives of the IUR and the Interail Community, together with representatives of the Centre and the European Youth Fund.

Contact:

UIC
rue Jean Rey 16
F-75015 Paris
Tel: +33/1/44.49.20.51
Fax: +33/1/44.49.20.59

GERMANY

ÖKOLOGISCHE
VERBRAUCHERBERATUNG E.V.

Ökologische Verbraucherberatung e.V. (Ecological Consumer Counselling Association) is a registered non-profit making association established in 1989 with a view to providing expert environmental advice to private and institutional households.

Twice a year the association publishes a study devoted to a particular domain of environmental counselling. This year the focus is on an aspect of biologically friendly housing: paints and varnishes.

Information brochures (in German) can be purchased on the following topics. Most of them have been published by the ÖVB itself:

- food irradiation
- tips when buying computers
- addresses of biologically friendly firms in the construction industry
- ecological investments
- list of direct sellers of ecologically grown foodstuffs in the Nürnberg/Fürth/Erlangen region
- addresses of natural foodstuffs stores, food cooperatives, biological butchers
- ecological test lists: E numbers, ecological house-cleaning, eco-washroom
- addresses of institutes and laboratories that measure poisons in the home (detailed particulars on the offers).
- sets of foils (for copying)
- "laundry and environment", companion volume
- "biological food seminar", companion volume
- "paints and varnishes"
- set of posters on paints and varnishes, based on an exhibition on that topic.

Further information:

ÖVB e.V.

Humboldtstr. 81

D-90459 Nürnberg

Opening hours:

Monday, tuesday, thursday: 09h00 - 13h00

Wednesday: 14h00 - 18h00

Friday: 09h00 - 12h00

FRANCE

COLLOQUIUM ON DIRECTIVE 92/59/EEC OF
29 JUNE 1992 ON GENERAL PRODUCT SAFETY -
MONTPELLIER, 10-11 JUNE 1994

The Colloquium was organised by the Montpellier Consumer Law Centre and participants included professors from various universities (Aix, Lyon, Montpellier, Dijon and others), researchers at the Consumer Law Centre, policy-makers (senators and others), representatives of the French Ministries of Industry and Justice, as well as organisations responsible for consumer affairs and related domains.

The main objective of the Colloquium was to analyze the content of the Directive on General Product Safety (92/59/EEC) and compare it with French legislation in force and the Directive on Liability for Defective Products (85/374/EEC) in order to determine whether French legislation as it stands (See Articles L-221-1 et seq. of the French Consumer Code) adequately transposes Directive 92/59/EEC into French law.

The Colloquium centred on six contributions followed by round tables where participants had the opportunity to discuss such subjects as:

- the scope of Directive 92/59/EEC by identifying products included/excluded as well as persons concerned or those who stand to gain or lose from the general safety requirement, this being defined as a general requirement (which is valid *erga omnes*) whose content is determined with reference both to intrinsic elements of the product (composition) and extrinsic elements (the product's environment, presentation and destination);
- obligations and powers of the Member States in the context of the Directive, with a distinction between preventing the existence of a danger and preventing the materialisation of an existing danger;
- operation of the procedures for exchanging information between the Member States, i.e. the procedures set out in Articles 7 and 8 of the Directive;
- the Commission's own powers in the context of the Directive, notably with regard to the procedures set out in Article 7, 8 and above all 9;
- the relations between Directive 92/59/EEC and civil liability rules established by it on liability for defective products.

Without anticipating the conclusions of the Colloquium, which will be published in its proceedings, the general impression that emerges from the discussions is that, although most participants consider that French law already incorporates the principles enshrined by Directive 92/59/EEC, there may be a need for minor modifications in order to ensure complete transposition (for example: add the monitoring requirement to the safety requirement of Article L-221-1 of the French Consumer Code).

Quite apart from analysis of transposition of the Directive into French law, the following points of interest were also raised during the discussions:

- the need for the Commission to play a bigger role in effectively policing application of Community legislation in the Member States;
- the importance of and need for greater coordination and transparency not only between the administrations in the different Member States (responsible for product safety) but also between services within a given Member State;
- the importance of effective and uniform application of legislation transposing Directive 92/59/EEC, in all the Member States, and of homogeneity of monitoring work;
- the urgent need to define uniformly the emergency criteria: notion of "serious and immediate risk";
- the importance of a clear definition by the Commission of the different scopes of the existing notification systems to avoid duplication of labour and useless work.

For further information contact:

Antonia GÁMEZ MORENO

Consumer Policy Service

European Commission

J70 4/13

rue de la Loi 200

B-1049 Brussels

Tel.: +32/2/296.57.95

Fax: +32/2/296.32.79

or

Le Centre du droit de la consommation

Faculté de droit

39 rue de l'Université

F-34060 Montpellier Cedex

Tel: +33/67.61.54.56

Fax: +33/67.60.87.65

BELGIUM

THE BELGIAN CONSUMER SAFETY COMMITTEE

At the study day of 15 June 1994 on consumer safety, organised by the *Centre de recherche et d'information des organisations de consommateurs* (CRIOC), **INFO-C** learnt about the creation of the Belgian Consumer Safety Committee. An equivalent body exists in France and in many ways the Belgian Committee will operate on comparable lines as far as the procedures are concerned.

This body was created because up to recently Belgium only had a number of vertical instruments governing certain broad categories of products such as foodstuffs or electrical equipment. And since Belgian law did not have any general safety requirement the authorities had very little say over categories of products which were not covered by these vertical instruments. Hence there was a need for horizontal legislation spanning the entire market. This has been the case since the entry into effect of the Act of 9 February 1994.

According to Hughes DUMONT, from the Ministry of Economic Affairs, such legislation can only bite with the help of concertation, involving joint vigilance and the participation of all the economic operators, consumers, traders and the public authorities. This is why the Safety Committee was attached to the Consumer Council, which played a major role in the adoption of this preventative legislation and has broad experience in the field of concertation.

Basically the new act transposes the European Directive of 29 June 1992 on general product safety, though its scope is wider in that it also covers services. The work of the Safety Committee thus falls within the context of the procedures provided for in this Directive, notably Article 9 concerning notifications in the event of serious and immediate risk. This provision *de facto* incorporates the system for the rapid exchange of information on dangerous products, pursuant to which a Member State which adopts an emergency measure must notify to the Commission, which in turn informs the other Member States. But the Directive lends a new dimension to this system, because under certain conditions a notification may trigger temporary measures applicable to the entire European Union, via an Emergencies Committee attached to the European Commission and consisting of representatives of the Member States. Naturally the Safety Committee, and in particular its emergencies unit, will be

closely involved in this procedure. Its opinion will be requested in the event of European notifications; the Belgian representatives will consult it when defining Belgium's viewpoint on specific risks, discussed or voted on within the EC Emergencies Committee.

These procedures now concern current and future Member States of the European Union, and indeed the entire European Economic Area.

Moreover, to function effectively and to avoid doubling of labour and unnecessary costs, the Safety Committee will have to draw on experience and useful solutions and results obtained elsewhere. In this context, it will have to forge contacts and collaborate closely with its counterparts in France, Portugal, Austria and Sweden and, more generally, equivalent agencies in the other Member States. This means that exchanges have to be encouraged, so that the Safety Committee can vouchsafe open concertation both as a recipient and source of information, an essential requirement if it is to work smoothly.

Contact:

Hughes DUMONT
Ministère des affaires économiques
Rue de Mot, 24-26
B-1040 Bruxelles
Tel: +32/2/233.60.90
Fax: +32/2/280.17.11

ITALY

CONSUMER INFORMATION

On 20 and 21 May 1994 in Florence the Tuscany Region organised a forum on consumer information in the European Union with the backing of the European Commission's Consumer Policy Service. Discussants included experts in the field of consumer affairs representing consumer associations and universities, the media and of course the CPS.

One thing that emerged from this forum was the crucial need for consumer information. Informed consumers are more demanding and put pressure on producers who, if they want to stay in business, have no alternative but to respond accordingly. This in turn influences the quality of their products.

The discussions focused on the usual issues with a Community dimension, such as banking services, cross-border purchases, and labelling.

But they also threw particular light on the Italian situation.

According to Tito CORTESE, Italian journalist and speaker, the Italian organisations had been catching up but they still had some way to go.

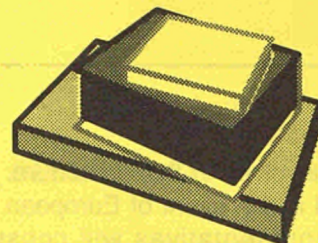
He drew attention to the problem of information in advertising, commonplace in Italy, and the danger of its being confused with information designed to protect consumers. There was the problem of using inappropriate media channels which might lead consumer organisations to think they had done enough, although the message had not got through. But the real headache in Italy was that there was no global structure for protecting consumer interests, because protection was implemented at regional level with an attendant lack of confidence in the legal instruments.

Pooling of experience and ideas with the other Member States was helping the Italian organisations to gain experience in lobbying national institutions. The great information deficit experienced by Italian consumers was spurring the Tuscany Region to organise frequent discussions and to hold numerous consultations with the European authorities.

Contact:

Regione Toscana
Comitato Regionale Consumatori-Utenti
Via dei Servi, 51
I - Firenze
Tel: +39/55/438.28.82
Fax: +39/55/289.063

PUBLICATIONS AND AUDIOVISUAL



- * Managing a budget, hire-purchasing, ordering goods from a catalogue or over the phone, signing a contract, exercising one's rights in the event of a dispute – all these everyday activities, so seemingly simple, require training.

This education should begin as soon as possible and be regularly refreshed. It should empower the consumer to behave responsibly and take a critical look at the blandishments that surround him. In Europe today, pressures are all the greater since the range of products is being diversified, selling techniques are improving, credit is easier to come by and communication technology is forging ahead.

School is the centrepiece of this education, but it is also a job for parents, consumer organisations, local authorities, social workers, the administrations concerned etc.

To help in this task the *Institut National de la Consommation* in Paris has produced a book entitled **La Consommation - Outils pédagogiques pour les enfants** listing educational aids suitable for children from as young as 3 years old. They cover a wide range of topics including consumer affairs, the family budget, the environment, advertising, nutrition, health, and safety in the home. As well as the usual written material, there are games, videos, slide shows, and quizzes. Available in French only, from various consumer organizations in France.

For further information:

Institut National de la Consommation
Service Formation
80 rue Lecourbe
F-75732 Paris Cedex 15
Tel: +33/1/45.66.20.69
Fax: +33/1/45.66.21.20

- * The Spanish *Instituto Nacional del Consumo* recently published its **Strategy Plan for Consumer Protection for the period 1994-1997 within the single market**, to coincide with the *Conferencia Sectorial de Consumo* held in Barcelona in March 1994.

For further information:

José Domingo GÓMEZ CASTALLO
Ministerio de Sanidad y Consumo
Instituto Nacional del Consumo
Príncipe de Vergara 54
E-28006 Madrid
Tel: +34/1/420.0000

- * The British Office of Fair Trading has recently published a free, 54-page, pocket-sized shoppers' guide to legal rights, how to complain and how to avoid trouble. This booklet, **A Buyer's Guide**, covers basic consumer advice and a selection of useful things to know before parting with money, such as the difference between estimates and quotations, buying on credit, mail order, doorstep selling and auctions, and dealing with misleading prices and untrue claims. The guide also tackles common problem areas including cars, home improvements and holidays. Useful addresses and telephone numbers are listed at the back of the guide.

A Buyer's Guide is available free of charge from:

Office of Fair Trading
PO Box 2
Central Way
Feltham
UK-Middlesex TW14 0TG
Tel: +44/81/398.3405

- * ADICONSUM (*Associazione Italiana Difesa Consumatori e Ambiente*) is currently running, with the support of the Consumer Policy Service of the European Commission, an awareness campaign "**Occhio... A**". They have produced posters and leaflets covering credit, product safety, toys, nutrition, package holidays, pharmaceuticals, misleading advertising, cosmetics, banks and labelling.

For further information:

ADICONSUM
Via Bonompagni 19
I-00187 Roma
Tel: +39/6/48.24.956
Fax: +39/6/48.24.005

- * Four new booklets have recently been published by *Consumers in Europe Group* (CEG), an umbrella body for UK organizations concerned with the effects of EU policies and proposals on UK consumers.

Meat and Medicine: Human health, safety and animal pharmaceuticals looks at the implications for human health of European Union policies on hormones, BST and other animal pharmaceuticals, as well as at issues such as the licensing of BST.

The Common Agricultural Policy: How to spend £28 billion a year without making anyone happy explains what the CAP is supposed to do, what has gone wrong and the costs of the CAP, and discusses its international, ethical and environmental implications, and what needs to be done about it.

Consumers in Europe: Your rights in the Single European Market, is a revised and updated edition of the booklet which CEG has produced, with Commission funding, giving advice for consumers on the benefits and pitfalls of buying goods and services in another Member State.

Making Europe Work for Everyone: a Consumer Manifesto for the 1994 European Parliament Elections, sets out a European consumer agenda for the next five years and emphasises that European problems need European solutions. Purely national measures, says CEG, have become less and less effective in protecting the consumer.

Copies can be obtained from:

CEG
24 Tufton Street
UK-London SW1P 3RB
Tel: +44/71/222.2662
Fax: +44/71/222.8586

- * Keeping consumers well informed of their rights is essential if the internal market is to be of real benefit to European citizens. With this in mind, *the Institut Européen Interrégional de la Consommation* and others, with the support of the European Commission, is launching an information campaign based on nine major consumer themes. Their objective is to make the consumer fully aware of his entitlement under European legislation to complain in his own country, and to provide him with useful addresses to help him resolve any difficulties he may encounter. Leaflets entitled '**Misleading Advertising**', '**Product Safety**' and '**Package Holidays**' have already been published and the following titles will be available shortly: Consumption Loans, Insurance, Banks, Pharmaceutical Goods, Cosmetics, and Labelling of Food Products.

These leaflets, as well as accompanying posters, will be available in several languages.

Contact:

IEIC
rue Barthélémy Delespaul 47bis
F-59000 Lille
Tel: +33/20.60.69.12
Fax: +33/20.42.09.31

- * In time for the good weather the Belgian Minister for Public Health, Jacques SANTKIN, has launched a new volume in the series *Guide des médicaments à l'usage des consommateurs* (see **INFO-C** No 2/1994), entitled *Au Soleil: Quels Médicaments?* (Sunbathing and médicaments). In other words, what kind of médicaments are compatible with sunbathing? Although the sun is good for morale and calcium formation, it can be dangerous for the skin, particularly in combination with certain médicaments. People may unexpectedly suffer severe sunstroke and allergies. Before heading for warmer climes, people should check whether any médicaments they are taking may trigger reactions when combined with exposure to sun, and ask their doctor for his advice. A list of these médicaments is included in the volume, together with comments and tips.

The volume was designed by doctors and is written in plain language. It can be had on simple request from:

Cabinet du Ministre de la Santé publique
Service presse
Eric Poskin
rue de la Loi 66
B-1040 Brussels
Tel: +32/2/238.28.11
Fax: +32/2/230.38.62
or
Centre coopératif de la consommation
rue Haute 28
B-1000 Brussels
Tel: +32/2/500.52.12
Fax: +32/2/514.54.43

- * Official Journals, COM documents, opinions of the Economic and Social Committee and reports and debates of the European Parliament can generally be obtained from the Luxembourg-based OPOCE. Another way is to get the addresses of the offices responsible for distributing these documents at national level from one of the European Commission's delegations in the Member States or an external delegation, in the case of countries outside the European Union.

However, if for one reason or another you cannot lay hold of these vital documents, CREDOC in Belgium can help you: it stores all these documents and will provide them on demand (write or fax). However, you have to pay for them!

For all further information:

CREDOC asbl
rue de la Montagne 34 to 11
B - 1000 Brussels
Tel: +32/2/511.69.41
Fax: +32/2/513.31.95

- * Since 1 May COLOC (*Comité de Liaison des Organisations de Consommateurs du Calvados*), France has been providing English-language information at all the offices run by its member associations.

COLOC has also published two pamphlets on **what to do in the event of an accident**. One, in French, is intended for people from Lower Normandy who are heading for Great Britain while the other, in English, is intended for Britons holidaying in Lower Normandy. These documents highlight the differences between both countries in regard to health, transport and who pays what in the event of an accident. This initiative has been possible thanks to the support of the European Commission (Consumer Policy Service).

Contact:

Joël LANGLOIS
COLOC
rue Neuve Saint Jean 12
F-14000 Caen
Tel: +33/31/50.38.50
Fax: +33/31/50.01.06
Minitel: +33/31/23.10.10

- * The *Union Féminine Civique et Sociale* (UFCS) in France, in collaboration with the *Commission de la Sécurité des Consommateurs* (CSC) has published a pamphlet on risks and how to prevent accidents in two domains: DIY and gardening. The titles are "**Je bricole en toute sécurité**" and "**Je jardine en toute sécurité**".

Contact:

UFCS
6 rue Béranger
F-75003 Paris
Tel: +33/1/42.72.19.18
Fax: +33/1/40.27.08.78
or
CSC
Télédoc 021
59 bd Vincent Auriol
F-75703 Paris Cedex 13
Tel: +33/44.87.17.17
Fax: +33/44.97.95.65
Minitel: 3614 SECURITAM

- * **Consumer law in Austria: Compendium of judgments**

For the practitioner, whether he be a trained lawyer, social worker or consumer adviser, it is essential to be up to date with current consumer law. Hitherto, there has been no clearly structured information on the situation in Austria, but now, thanks to the Consumer Information Association (VKI), legal experts with years of experience in consumer law have produced comprehensive documentation on the main items of consumer case law.

This practical manual fills a gap. Although the Austrian consumer protection law has been in force for 14 years and an interesting body of case law has accumulated on the product liability act, comprehensive documentation has so far been lacking. The recently published compendium of judgments on consumer law "*Konsumentenrecht: Entsscheidungssammlung*" (KRES) comprises:

- a full description of the main aspects of consumer law by reference to the consumer protection and product liability act;
- judgments on international private law, error and default, liability for services, warranty in relation to purchase agreements and work contracts, and much more;
- judgments from the Supreme Court and a wide range of judgments from lower courts (some of them never before published);
- a clear breakdown of the various judgments (subject area/law/keyword/citation/ source/headnote/content/commentary), numerous cross-references and bibliographical references, and a comprehensive catalogue of keywords arranged by problem area and subject area.

The documentation is offered in the form of a loose-leaf collection. By subscribing, the user can be sure of being kept up to date on all aspects of consumer law.

The first volume (an A5 loose-leaf compendium, with some 230 judgments on approximately 600 pages) deals with the consumer protection act, international private law, general business conditions (Articles 864a and 879 of the AGBG) and product liability.

The second volume will be out at the end of September 1994 (roughly the same size as Volume 1) and will deal with warranty in relation to purchase agreements and work contracts.

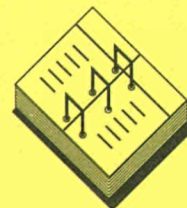
The two volumes can be ordered as a set at the total price of 1 440 Austrian Schillings (plus postage and packing) and will be despatched from 1 October 1994.

The third volume, dealing with error, default, liability for services and other interesting judgments, is due to appear at the end of 1995.

Orders please to:

Verein für Konsumenteninformation
A-1060 Wien
Mariahilfestr. 81
Tel: +43/1587.35.14
Fax: +43/1587.93.00.38

Diary



14 September 1994

“Scientific expertise in the public debate in Europe” is the title of a conference being organised by the Department of Geography at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Scientific expertise is an essential element in decision-making in a certain number of controversial domains. In discussions on risks linked to technological innovation and problems of public health and the environment, all participants rely on expert judgments. Governments, industry, consumer organisations, pressure groups – all draw on the opinions of experts to lend credence to their position or justify their role in the public debate.

However these questions can never be resolved by science alone. But they have a major impact on the choices our societies have to make in conditions of growing complexity and uncertainty.

Up to now the specifically European dimension of these questions has not been subjected to detailed scrutiny. What is the impact of the fact that a growing number of decisions are being taken at European level? What are the consequences for transnational and global issues? Do cultural differences between states play a major role? Is there a way of getting a handle on these characteristic European problems? These are some of the issues which will be explored during the conference.

Information from:

London School of Economics and Political Science
Houghton Street
London WC2 2AE
Tel: +44/71/955.68.13
Fax: +44/71/955.68.14

28 and 29 September 1994

In order to take action to reduce the number of injuries at home and during leisure time, responsible authorities need to know the key issues that require priority attention.

During the past few years of research on accidents, a lot of experience has been acquired with regard to the indicators relevant for this priority-setting. ECOSA, in collaboration with SICHER LEBEN, plans to provide a forum for the exchange of these experiences and the advancement of work in this area.

The objective of this conference is to exchange views on priority-setting for policy development within the field of accidents at home and during leisure time activities, in government, enforcement and control authorities, research agencies, business groups and consumer representative bodies, and other interested groups.

Contact:

ECOSA secretariat
c/o Consumer Safety Institute
PO Box 75169
NL - 1070 AD Amsterdam
Tel: +31/20/511.45.52
Fax: +31/20/669.28.31

To obtain your (free) subscription to **INFO-C**
simply fill in the reply coupon below and return it to the following address:

Sheila REYNOLDS

Consumer Policy Service
European Commission
rue de la Loi 200
J70 4/14
B-1049 Brussels
Fax : +32/2/296.32.79



Name and forename :

Organization :

Profession :

Street :

Town :

Postcode :

Country :

Phone and fax :

Wishes to receive **INFO-C** in EN / FR / DE *

* Delete as applicable

N.B. Don't forget to inform us of any change of address!



Name and forename :

Organization :

Profession :

Street :

Town :

Postcode :

Country :

Phone and fax :

Wishes to receive **INFO-C** in EN / FR / DE *

* Delete as applicable

N.B. Don't forget to inform us of any change of address

Catalogue No C5 BQ-94-005-EN-C