



INFO-C

Information from the Consumer Policy Service of the European Commission - Quarterly n°7

While we wait for Maastricht

An opinion poll on consumer protection carried out last winter has revealed that almost 90% of EC consumers believe consumer protection should be the same in all 12 Member States. It is difficult to imagine a better indication of support for EC work, in this area.

While waiting for the final ratifications of the Treaty on European Union by the Danes and the British, and by this the adoption of a new and expanded legal base, the Community has not been idle.

The Consumer Affairs Council on March 2 advanced, notably by adopting the Directive on unfair terms in consumer contracts and a resolution on product labelling; both of these themes are covered in this issue of **INFO-C** together with the other points discussed by the ministers.

The Danish presidency not only took the initiative to propose the Council resolution on labelling,

but also plans to hold a conference in June this year on the labelling of consumer products in the Internal Market. The Danish "Varefakta" labelling system is described in this issue as a contribution to the debate on this important theme.

Although of a quite different character than these political developments, the never ceasing increase in the demand for **INFO-C** is in its own way an indication that things are moving. Since its launch in 1991, its circulation has gone up from 1700 to 5000 copies!

Our new logo has hopefully played its role in this. Developed for the consumer information programme also covered in this issue, but increasingly to be used by the SPC, it not only conveys an image of the EC consumer protection policy and the SPC as the guardian of consumers, but also enhances the graphical qualities of **INFO-C**.

INFO-C

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CONSUMER AFFAIRS COUNCIL

The Council of Ministers for Consumer Affairs of the Twelve met on 2 March 1993 under the Danish Presidency.

As announced in the previous issue of **INFO-C** (No. 6), we have here published the results of the discussions item by item, as they appeared on the agenda.

The contact person in charge of each dossier has been given at the end of the article concerned.

Unfair terms

After two and a half years of discussions, the Council has made a definitive move on adoption of the Directive on unfair terms in consumer contracts. It was not, however, possible for it to be formally adopted on 2 March 1993 because, according to Mario Tenreiro, in charge of the dossier at the Consumer Policy Service, two minor amendments had been made which would necessitate further linguistic revision of the text. It was, however, adopted definitively at another Council meeting in April 1993. Designed to approximate legislation in the different Member States, the Directive is the result of more than sixteen years' work on the subject at Community level, its purpose being to compensate for a perceived lack of legal certainty for consumers when concluding contracts. Consumers wishing to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the single market are currently inadequately protected in a situation where there are twelve different legal systems governing the terms of contracts which, moreover, are often drawn up in a language other than that of the consumer and are therefore often difficult to understand and may prejudice the consumer's interests.

The Directive not only establishes the principle whereby consumers are not bound by unfair terms in the contracts they conclude, but also obliges the Member States to take effective measures to prevent the use of such terms altogether. Such measures must in-

clude giving recognised consumers' associations the right to apply to the courts or appropriate administrative bodies in order to establish officially that certain terms intended for general inclusion are unfair and consequently have them removed from contracts.

The Directive sets out general criteria for assessing whether specific terms are unfair. According to these criteria, a term is regarded as unfair if, contrary to the requirements of good faith, it creates a significant discrepancy between the rights and obligations of parties to the contract contrary to the interests of the consumer. In addition, an indicative, non-exhaustive list of the types of term which are particularly detrimental to the consumer's interests is given in the Annex, providing a guideline for more uniform application of the law by the various national authorities and increasing legal certainty for economic operators and consumers.

Only contract terms which have not been negotiated individually by the consumer are covered by this text, which is mainly concerned with contracts drawn up on the basis of general standardised conditions.

It also leaves Member States free to ensure a higher level of consumer protection if they so wish. The Directive must be transposed by Member States by 31 December 1994 and its provisions will apply to all contracts concluded after that date.

The Commission is required to submit a report on implementation of the Directive to the Council and the Parliament by 31 December 1999. According to Mrs Scrivener, this report will, where appropriate, be accompanied by proposals for increasing consumer protection.

Reference : O.J. n° L 95, 21.4.93, p. 29

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Timeshares

This proposal for a Directive, commonly referred to by its English abbreviation "Timeshares", concerns "the protection of purchasers in contracts relating to the utilisation of immovable property on a timeshare basis". As this dossier was still with the European Parliament awaiting a first reading, the Council discussion was confined to a policy debate. Discussion at the Consumer Affairs Council of 3 November 1992 (cf INFO-C No 5) had already indicated that most of the delegations were in favour of this kind of legal instrument.

The proposal is intended to increase consumer protection through:

- improved requirements in terms of the information to be supplied on the elements (rights and obligations) of a contract;
- compulsory "escape" clauses in the contract giving the purchaser the right to withdraw within the deadline laid down in the Directive;
- guarantees required from the vendor;

while leaving Member States the option of adopting or maintaining more rigorous measures to protect purchasers.

The Council discussions focussed on four main points:

- **guarantees and penalties**
- **downpayments**
- **right of cancellation of the loan contract**
- **legal protection for the consumer.**

It is worth noting that the Economic and Social Committee (ESC) feels, with regard to the time limit in the withdrawal clause for purchasers, that there should be one single period of 28 days. Its stated opinion was that the main questions had been adequately dealt with in the Commission's proposal. According to its final paragraph, the Committee therefore intended to support the proposal for a Directive.

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Labelling

On the basis of a draft presented by the Danish Presidency on 12 January 1993, the Council recorded its agreement on the text of a Resolution on measures concerning product labelling in the interests of consumers.

The text points out that labelling of products is one way of guaranteeing improved information and transparency, helping consumers to choose between a variety of goods and services.

The Council therefore called upon the Commission, in consultation with the Member States and other parties concerned (consumers, industry, traders' organisations) to consider whether action at Community level is necessary and justified and to examine on this basis the possibility of establishing a Community framework for labelling requirements.

Annexed to the Resolution are various points for consideration by the Commission. The Commission is also required to present its conclusions to the Council as soon as possible and submit appropriate proposals by June 1994.

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EHLASS

The dossier on the Community information system on home and leisure accidents, set up in 1986 and christened EHLASS (European Home and Leisure Accident Surveillance System), gave rise to a policy debate on the basis of a Commission communication and a proposal for a Decision introducing a Community system of information on home and leisure accidents.

Reference is made to Decision 86/138/EEC as amended by Decision 90/534/EEC, which set up a demonstration project with a view to introducing a Community system of information on home and leisure accidents (EHLASS), to run until 1 December 1991. Following evaluation of the second phase of the demonstration project (1990 - 1991), the Commission communication recognises the usefulness of a Community system of information on home and leisure accidents, particularly

for the Member States, and argues in favour of Community support.

Concluding the discussion, during which the great majority of delegations were in favour of extending the system for a further five years, the Council requested the Committee of Permanent Representatives to continue work, taking account of the opinion of the European Parliament, with a view to reaching an early agreement.

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Exchange of information on risky products

Pending the opinion of the European Parliament, the Council held a policy debate on the proposal for a Decision concerning the institution of a Community system for the exchange of information in respect of certain products which may jeopardize consumers' health or safety. This proposal covers certain products which present a risk **but which do not constitute a serious and immediate danger** (cf. article on p. 7/8 of INFO-C No. 6) and which are not covered by any other Community-wide information exchange system.

To enable the proposal to be adopted quickly, the Commission has undertaken to clarify its scope by drawing up a reference list of the main existing Community legislation providing for the exchange of information on the products in question.

At the close of the Council discussions, the Committee of Permanent Representatives was asked to draw up a text quickly, taking account of the opinion of the European Parliament.

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Action Plan of Consumer Policy (1990-1992)

Mrs Scrivener, Member of the European Commission with special responsibility for consumer protection, gave an oral report to the Council on the Commission's

three-year action plan for consumer protection, which notes substantial progress in many areas, such as:

- **transposition of the Directives** on consumer protection into the legislation of Member States, where monitoring of their application is now guaranteed;
- **consumer representation** through the Consumers Consultative Committee (CCC), set up in 1990, and various other Community-level organisations;
- **improved consumer information**, European Consumer Information Centres having been set up in greater numbers and more quickly than expected;
- **more transparency**, particularly in respect of cross-border financial transactions and labelling of foodstuffs;
- **promotion of comparative testing**;
- consumer **protection** in transactions (particularly with regard to unfair contract terms);
- consumer **safety** for products and services, and through the rapid information exchange system.

As well as reporting on past activities, Mrs Scrivener gave an indication of future priorities, which would serve as a guideline for presentation to the Council and European Parliament of a **new Three-Year Plan** to cover the period **1993 - 1995**.

These priorities are:

- Objective: to **really** make the single market work for European consumers;
- **To consolidate existing legislation**, ensuring that the subsidiarity principle is respected in certain cases, in accordance with the conclusions of the European Council in Edinburgh, and to ensure effective implementation;
- Consumer **information** through continued development of the European Consumer Information Centres (cf. article on the Centre in Portugal in the Euro-Infos section) and publication of a guide for European consumers in the single market.
- Three more specifically sectoral target areas are:
 - * **Access to justice for consumers**
 - * **Financial services, particularly banking**
 - * **Guarantees and after-sales service.**

- **Diversification of measures** at Community level to take account of the new approach;
- **More consultation:**
 - * improved consumer representation
 - * dialogue with firms.

A special edition of **INFO-C** will be published when the new Three-Year Plan is adopted.

Comparative advertising

The proposal for a Council Directive concerning comparative advertising and amending Direc-

tive 84/450/EEC concerning misleading advertising is currently being reexamined by the Commission. An amended proposal should be available once opinions have been received from the European Parliament and Economic and Social Committee. The Commission has given the Council a progress report.

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DANSK VAREFAKTA NÆVN (DVN) (DANISH INSTITUTE FOR INFORMATIVE LABELLING)

Objective

DVN's objective is to "strive for voluntary use of informative labelling of consumer goods and of services for consumers. The labelling shall comprise a statement of the content and/or characteristics or similar features".

The idea is to provide essential, sufficient and properly checked information which is easy to compare so that consumers are able themselves to choose the right goods to suit their immediate requirements, needs and budget.

Structure

DVN was founded in 1957 on the basis of the report of a committee of inquiry into quality labelling.

The structure chosen for the DVN was a management board with overall responsibility for policy, an executive committee and a secretariat. The members of the management board are from a range of organisations, all associated in some way with labelling. The board comprised representatives of the Arbejderbevægelsens Erhvervsråd (The Economic Board of the Danish Labour Movement), Detailhandelens Fællestråd (Danish Retail Association), Dansk Standard (Danish Standards Association), FORCE Institutterne, the National Institute for Testing and Verification-Dantest, Forbrugerrådet (Consumers Council), Fællesforeningen for Danmarks Brugsforeninger (FDB Co-op Denmark), Det danske Handelskammer (Danish Chamber of Commerce), Håndværksrådet (Da-

nish Federation of Crafts and Small Industries), Dansk Industri (Confederation of Danish Industries) and Statens Husholdningsråd (Danish National Council for Domestic Science). In 1985, the board was expanded to include a representative of the Landbrugsraadet (Agricultural Council of Denmark).

The organisations represented on the board appoint a chairman and select a vice-chairman from among the members of the board.

Day-to-day operations are carried out by a secretariat whose director is appointed by the board. At present (March 1993) there is a staff of 10 including the director.

Funding

DVN's work is funded partly through the sale of labelling permits, partly through a grant from the Ministry of Industry (some DKR 1.2 million per year) and through contributions from the organisations represented on the board.

Cooperation

DVN works with many authorities including the National Food Agency, the Veterinary Service, the Plantedirektoratet (Phytological Service), the National Agency of Environmental Protection and the National Consumer Agency of Denmark.

It also works with the Dansk Teknologisk Institut (Institute of Technology), the Consumers Council, insurance companies and the Danish Research Centre for Applied Electronics.

VAREFAKTA certificates

The secretariat issues certificates for virtually all types of goods from foodstuffs to bedding, washing powder, bicycle locks, smoke alarms and furniture.

Certificates issued by DVN are known as **VAREFAKTA** and are represented by the following symbol :



The certificates are drawn up on the basis of rules or methods laid down in a regulation, each regulation covering a particular group of products. In all, DVN has a total of 135 regulations, all constantly updated and revised. Approximately four new regulations are approved each year.

Among the contents of the regulation are guidelines on what information should be given on the certificate and in which order, on the testing procedure and on subsequent random sampling.

The regulations are drawn up on the basis of current legislation, EC directives, recommendations and regulations, standards, and other published rules and requirements of or requests from the organisations belonging to the board or by the above cooperation partners.

In determining what information should be given on the completed certificate, considerable attention is paid to the wishes of consumers. However, all regulations must be approved by the board, which ensures that all interests are taken into account.

Before a regulation is sent to the board for approval, it is submitted for comments to a wide range of interested parties ranging from sectoral organisations to companies, public authorities and laboratories.

Statutory requirements

The information to be given to consumers must always comply with Danish marketing legislation which forbids "incorrect, misleading or unreasonably inadequate information".

Within particular categories of merchandise, the information to be given to consumers is also regulated by particular legislation.

Foodstuffs are the most strictly regulated field. An EC labelling directive lays down general rules for the labelling of foodstuffs covering the merchandise's designation, net contents, ingredients, etc. A specific directive regulates a statement of the nutritional value.

Another field regulated by the EC comprises products for washing and cleaning.

DVN Requirements

VAREFAKTA certificates provide all the information consumers need to choose merchandise meeting their actual requirements.

This means that DVN labelling requirements are often more stringent than the statutory ones.

One example is detergents, where a Commission recommendation states that information must be given on 18 listed substances. However, some substances such as optical whiteners, silicates, colorants and perfume are not mentioned in the recommendation. DVN has since issued a requirement that these substances be declared. Manufacturers can accordingly receive a **VAREFAKTA** certificate only if they comply with this requirement although it has no statutory force.

DVN has similar stricter rules for foodstuffs. For example, DVN has instituted a requirement to show the date of production for fresh merchandise such as dairy products, delicatessen meats, fresh fish and products containing more than 10% meat.

For more than 20 years, DVN has had particular descriptive rules which say for example that the sugar or fat content of foodstuffs must be at least 30% lower than other comparable products before they can be described as dietetic.

On the other hand, products described for example as rich in proteins or vitamins must have at least 30% more of these nutrients than comparable other products.

Under the EC labelling directive, ingredients need not be specified if they make up less than 25% of the finished product. Here, too, DVN requires a comprehensive listing.

For groups of products whose labelling is not subject to either EC or Danish national legislation, DVN lays down requirements in cooperation with sectoral organi-

sations or other interested parties. This is, for example, the case for the labelling of babies' dummies and of furniture, bed linen, mattresses and cycle locks.

For eiderdowns and pillows, DVN has developed a special colour coding for capacity, where capacity is the expression of the level of the insulation offered by the eiderdown/pillow. A capacity of more than 8 receives a red marking, more than 6 a blue one, more than 4 green and more than 2 yellow. The colour coding has become so accepted in Denmark that advertisements by eiderdown manufacturers now state "red-label eiderdown".

With regard to bicycle locks, DVN has a formal cooperative relationship with insurance companies, the Dansk Cyklistforbund (Danish Cyclist Association) and the police for the development of test methods to ensure that consumers have insurance cover if their bicycle is stolen despite the use of a DVN-approved lock.

Monitoring

Before a product receives a DVN certificate, it is sent for testing to independent laboratories or test institutes. Approximately once a year thereafter a random sample is taken. Many of DVN's largest customers have their own laboratory facilities qualified to conduct the tests. Their analysis reports are usually recognised for the purposes of issuing a VAREFAKTA certificate for the product.

This does not, however, mean that goods are not checked by an external, impartial laboratory or test institute, only that it is less common.

Impartial random testing is essential for DVN but on the other hand the costs associated with using the **VAREFAKTA** system must be kept at a reasonable level given that clients pay all expenses arising from testing.

DVN does not have its own laboratories or test facilities but commissions "external" monitoring checks and analyses to ensure that the income DVN receives as a testing organisation does not raise doubts about its impartiality.

Misuse

DVN can withdraw labelling approval with immediate effect if the possessor infringes the conditions on

which its issuance was based. This may, for example, be because the **VAREFAKTA** label is being used on goods for which it was not issued or because it is being marketed in a misleading way.

It is very seldom that DVN is forced to withdraw labelling approval since disputes can usually be amicably resolved.

Payment

The holders of the label pay an annual subscription to use **VAREFAKTA**. Subscriptions are divided into groups, foodstuffs being one of the cheapest and furniture one of the most expensive. It costs DKR 4 280 for certificates on up to 10 different foodstuffs and DKR 12 800 for up to 10 different items of furniture.

The subscription price includes a number of hours of consultant's time to draw up the certificate and complete check reports. Additional hours are charged at an hourly rate of DKR 685.

Special rates are often given to clients seeking certificates for more than 30 products.

Marketing

A proportion of the subscription price is earmarked for marketing and information.

Marketing is directed partly at consumers to make them more aware of **VAREFAKTA** and partly towards manufacturers to widen the circle of companies possessing the label.

Marketing is done by television spots within information programmes, newspapers advertisements, the distribution of leaflets and educational materials and sending out press releases and articles to daily, local and weekly newspapers.

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EUROPEAN CONSUMER INFORMATION AGENCIES

Opening of a new European Consumer Information Agency in Portugal

On 15 March 1993 the sixth European Consumer Information Agency was officially inaugurated in Guimaraes in Portugal. As we announced in the previous issue, this Agency, the planning for which was carried out by the Instituto Nacional de Defesa do Consumidor, has already established close cooperation with the Spanish region of Galicia. An agreement to this effect has been signed by representatives of the relevant Portuguese departments and of the Directorate-General for Trade and Consumer Affairs of the Council for Industry and Trade in Galicia.

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Correction:

The European Consumer Information Agency "Eurokon", serving the German-Belgian-Dutch border region around Aachen, referred to in **INFO-C no 6**, has informed us of its new telephone number. This is now: +49/241/404.526.

In addition, we omitted the address of the Agency's Dutch partner:

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BRIEFINGS ON EC CONSUMER POLICY

Encouraging First Results!!

The Commission, in cooperation with the European Parliament, has embarked on a Community-wide information programme to make consumers more aware of their rights under EC law. The programme consists of information briefings and press communiques on a wide variety of topics which will take place in each member state before the end of July 1993. At each briefing a prominent MEP or Commission official explains in simple terms which new Community rules protect consumers, and how consumers can ensure that their rights are safeguarded.

A first series of briefings, which focussed on Travel and Tourism, took place in Member States during the week before Easter. The media response has been highly encouraging, with much instantaneous coverage in national newspapers, as well as television news and information broadcasts. Furthermore, many newspapers and TV stations have committed themselves to further coverage in the medium term.

Plans are now being finalised for the entire programme, and over the coming months European consumers will be informed about their rights in the following subject areas:

- * Product safety
- * Advertising
- * Consumer credit*
- * Unfair contract terms*
- * Pharmaceutical products.
- * Cosmetics
- * Labelling of foodstuffs
- * Banking services
- * Insurance

A more detailed report of the results of this programme will be published in the next issue of INFO-C. For further information, contact Unit 5 of the Commission's Consumer Policy Service (telephone: 2958633).



Press briefing on product safety, 28.4.1993 in Brussels. From left to right : R. GIELISSE - from the CPS, C.P. DELCROIX - mep, J.F. VAN DEN BROECK - Head of the Commission's office in Belgium.

THE EC ECO-LABEL



The European Community will launch a new scheme in June 1993 for the identification of products with a reduced environmental impact. The arrival of the EC "eco-label" means that consumers can now expect to see certain products stamped with an independent seal of approval. This seal appears in the form of a flower-shaped design, the petals of which consist of the twelve stars of the EC Member States (see below). Unlike other forms of environmental-awareness indicators, the EC eco-label will be awarded only to products which meet challenging environmental criteria fixed by EC-wide agreement.

The EC Commission is working with the Member States and the eco-labelling "competent bodies" which they have set up to develop the scheme. Expert groups, appointed jointly by the Commission and the Member States, have prepared the criteria by which the various product groups are to be assessed. The award of the EC eco-label will be policed by the "competent bodies" at the national level and, ultimately, by the Commission.

The criteria to be applied will vary for each product group, but in each case they will be fixed on the basis of an analysis of the product's environmental impact throughout its entire life cycle. This may include consideration of the amount of energy that is consumed during the manufacture or use of the product, whether any emissions pollute air, water or land during its manufacture, use or disposal, and whether there is any potential for recycling of the product. It is important to emphasize that the criteria are specific to individual product groups and highlight better environmental performance within those groups. They do not claim that a product is absolutely environmentally friendly.

At present, criteria have been agreed for the first two product groups - dishwashers and washing machines -

and the "competent bodies" will award the label to conforming products in the coming months. It is expected that criteria will be agreed for at least half a dozen more product groups - including light bulbs and hair-sprays - by the end of the year.

The EC eco-label has been introduced to overcome the potential confusion to consumers that may be caused by the number of environmental claims being made by manufacturers. In practice what it means is that manufacturers must now apply to national bodies to be allowed to put this label - which is easily recognisable (see below) - on their products. As a result, it is expected that increasing numbers of manufacturers will ensure that their products achieve a higher environmental performance. In the meantime, consumers will be able to choose the least environmentally damaging product within a given product range when they are making their purchase.

Reference:

Council Regulation (EEC) No 880/92 of 23 March 1992. As this is a Regulation, which is a higher legal instrument, it is directly applicable in all Member States and therefore does not require transposition into national law.

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SPECIAL CPS PUBLICATION

An "Inventory of Community acts relating to consumer affairs" is available to all citizens interested in consumer matters from the documentation unit of the Consumer Policy Service.

This document is regularly updated and lists all Commission initiatives concerning consumer protection for which the CPS is responsible, as well as others for which the Service is not responsible but which may also be of interest to consumers, and cases heard by the Court of Justice of the European Communities.

This inventory is produced in French and English and is provided free of charge to interested parties.

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ENVIRONMENTALLY AWARE CONSUMPTION

The European Parliament has introduced a new line into the 1993 budget for the Consumer Policy Service to facilitate the financing of actions designed to promote environmental awareness among consumers and to encourage the development of consumption habits which will be less damaging to the environment.

The first task is to examine and evaluate what has already been done with regard to this issue and the Service is currently in the process of trying to assemble the acquired knowledge on the subject whether in the form of literature, studies, research, practical actions or whatever. Any references in this respect which readers may be able to supply should be communicated to the name and address given at the end of this article.

A second task is to promote practical action whether by way of imparting information on the subject or supporting feasible and effective projects and activities which have the objective of improving consumption practices so as to reduce their adverse impact on the environment. Again, if there are any realistic suggestions in this regard the Consumer Policy Service would be glad to receive them. There may be, for example, feasibility studies which have already been carried out but which, for one reason or another, have not been acted upon. There may be actual projects or schemes which were launched but subsequently discontinued or not followed-up by way of further action based on the initial results. We would like to hear about them!

Thirdly, the Commission intends, having regard to what may already exist, to initiate a number of studies relevant to the subject in question, the results of which it is hoped will form the basis for further specific and coherent action in this area.

Clearly this is a subject which is of considerable interest and concern to many people. A number of

surveys have indicated, on the one hand, a great willingness on the part of consumers to take action which is positively designed to contribute to greater protection of the environment while, on the other hand, they have highlighted a certain amount of confusion and an information deficit as to the most efficient and effective ways of taking such action.

Consumers can play a crucial role in furthering meaningful environmental protection provided that the correct conditions exist. Information which is understandable, factual and verifiable is an essential element in creating conditions conducive to enabling consumers to perform this role. Provided with proper information consumers can confidently examine their purchasing and consumption practices with a view to making realistic adjustments thereto in favour of the environment.

Another important condition is that environmental claims in respect of marketed products must be well founded and the products themselves, apart from environmental considerations, must satisfy other basic consumer needs particularly with regard to health, safety, performance and value for money. Finally, to reap the maximum benefits for all concerned from the production-consumption-environmental protection partnership there should be good trust and co-operation between the partners. It is vital, therefore, that consumers are actively involved in relevant dialogue and developments in this area.

Readers of **INFO-C** will continue to be informed with regard to the work of the Commission and other matters considered to be of interest in this field. (see also the Diary p. 23)

NB : A conference on "Sustainable Consumption" was organised by the International Organisation of Consumers Unions (IOCU) from 27 — 29 April 1993 in The Hague (Netherlands); we hope to carry an article on it in **INFO-C** No 8.

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BUYING CARS ABROAD

Now that the fateful date of 01.01.1993 is behind us, there is one area in which European Consumers could

reasonably expect to see the Single Market operating to their advantage : car purchase.

Because of their high capital cost, the price of new cars has always been the subject of public interest, particularly when there is the prospect of substantial savings by buying abroad.

The variation in prices between Member State countries has long been examined and debated. Can the consumer now be satisfied with the results ? The present situation, seen from three points of view, is described below - but first a few facts :

Background to the present situation

The distribution of cars in the Common Market is governed by what is called, in short, "block exemption". Normally, under the rules on competition set out in Chapter 1 of the Treaty of Rome, undertakings must not "... limit or control ... markets ... apply dissimilar conditions to equivalent transactions... make the conclusion of contracts subject to acceptance... of supplementary obligations."

Undertakings can be exempted from these rules by the Commission if it "contributes to improving the production distribution of goods or to promoting technical or economic progress, while allowing consumers a fair share of the resulting benefit... " Such an exemption has been granted under Regulation 123/85 and will continue until 1995 when it will be reviewed. The effect of this exemption from the normal rules of competition is to allow manufacturers to restrict the supply of their cars to designated dealers.

It was however subject to certain conditions :

- a) sales between distributors in different Community Countries is permitted.
- b) Consumers or intermediaries acting for them, can buy wherever they want in the Community (the system of parallel imports).
- c) Price differences should not be "substantial". Substantial, in this context, is defined as being 12% over a sustained period or 18% at any given moment.

I. The consumer organisations

Unsurprisingly, consumer representatives are not satisfied with the situation.

They point, inter alia, to :

- The difficulty of obtaining statistical evidence on the working of the system of parallel imports.
- The lack of information available to potential purchasers concerning the procedures to be followed.
- The continuing reluctance of some dealers to sell cars to non-residents.
- Problems with warranties and servicing
- The fact that price differentials do exceed the limits laid down by the Commission, i.e. prices throughout the Community are not being brought into line.
- The virtual impossibility in determining whether, in the terms of Regulation 123/85, the variations are "chiefly due to obligations exempted by this Regulation". This difficulty arises because of the effect of discounts, differences in equipment, engines, etc.

II. Directorate General for Competition (DG IV)

It is the role of the Commission in general and DG IV in particular to monitor the situation and to try to ensure that consumers do indeed get "a fair share of the resulting benefit".

In May 1992, it set out its conclusions as to the way the exemption was affecting the market. The Commission had carried out a price study in two stages. In the second stage the 21 cars which had shown the greatest variation in price during the first stage, were subjected to closer examination.

The wide variations noted during stage I were considerably reduced once the differences in specification had been taken into account by an adjustment in the price levels. Nevertheless certain models, during certain periods, continued to show a difference of price greater than that laid down in Regulation 123/85.

The general conclusion which the Commission drew from the study was that the block exemption cannot be said to be the main cause of these excessive price dif-

ferences. This did not mean that the Commission was satisfied with the situation or that it considered that the points raised by consumer organizations were without foundation. Its efforts would, until 1995, concentrate on those factors which would help to make the Single Market in motor vehicles a reality. It therefore called on the car distributors, with the cooperation of manufacturers, to ensure that consumers are able to buy cars with specifications other than normally supplied on their home market and to do so without unreasonable delay or undue extra expenses.

As a contribution towards improving the transparency of the car market, manufacturers will publish, every six months, lists of prices in all Member States, except Greece and Denmark for certain popular models. The first lists appear in May 1993. The existence of these lists will make it easier to compare prices across the Community and to see whether the provisions of Regulation 123/85 are being respected.

The situation will be reviewed by the Commission after December 1993.

III. Sir Leon Brittan

The most recent word, but surely not the last, came from the Commissioner then responsible. In a statement on 14 December, he welcomed the positive response from the manufacturers, who have acted to clarify the rights and obligation of dealers and to render car prices more easily comparable.

He noted a decrease in consumer complaints, a sign that the Commission's initiatives were beginning to bear fruit. Nevertheless, the renewal of the block exemption 1995 is still an open question.

VAT is payable in the Country of destination which is normally the Country in which the car is registered. The basis of charge varies. Since 1 January 1993, the standard rate in the Community is at least 15%.

(1) O.J. n° C 15, 18.1.85, p. 16

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DG IV

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ACCESSIBILITY OF THE COMMISSION'S WORK AND DIALOGUE WITH SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

On 2 December 1992 the Commission of the European Communities adopted a Communication entitled "Increased transparency in the work of the Commission"(1).

This Communication sets out various ways of improving the preparation of the Commission's proposals and initiatives. It is to be read in parallel with the Communication on "An open and structured dialogue between the Commission and special interest groups"(2).

These texts were adopted immediately before the European Council in Edinburgh, where ways of opening up European Community's activities were discussed. The European Council welcomed the Commission's approach and also approved the proposal for the Council to improve access to its work by organising open debate on the work programme and major initiatives of Community interest. The Council will also make the results of votes public.

The main purpose of the Commission's action is to make the preparation phase of proposals and decisions more transparent and more accessible so that comments are received from all quarters and to ensure that the departments and officials concerned consider at the earliest possible stage how best to foster public debate as a contribution to the formulation and improvement of the Commission's proposals and decisions.

The Commission has decided that its annual work programmes, starting with that for 1994, will be issued in October to allow wider discussion. In this document, as well as in the legislative programme, it will announce initiatives which have broad implications, on which it could take wider soundings. The Commission will thus bring its intentions into the public domain at an early stage.

Opportunities for the expression of views

The Commission has decided to adopt a twin-track approach to enabling all interested parties to do this:

Firstly, by greater use of consultative documents (Green Papers) before formal proposals are drawn up. These documents may not only set out the Commis-

sion's ideas and/or describe possible options, but may also indicate arrangements for special interest groups (including consumers' groups) to express their views (deadline, need to make submissions in writing, possibility of holding hearings in certain circumstances, etc.).

Secondly, by a new "notification" procedure, the aim of which is to ensure that all interested parties are informed of the work in hand at the Commission. The Commission would publish a brief summary of the proposed policy initiative in the C series of the Official Journal, information on how to obtain copies of the document, a deadline for interested parties to respond and the name and address of the person to whom any such response should be sent.

References: (1) O.J. n° C 63, 5.3.93, p. 8
(2) O.J. n° C 63, 5.3.93, p. 2

Contact:

Adriaan VAN DER MEER
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INFORMATION NETWORK FOR HANDICAPPED PERSONS

HANDYNET is the "computerised information system and network for disabled people". It was set up under the **HELIOS** programme established in 1988 with the aim of promoting equality of opportunity and the integration of handicapped persons in the European Community.

With regard more specifically to technical aids, it is a vehicle for information, communication and cooperation for the benefit of the disabled and for those enga-

ged in promoting their economic and social integration. In addition, **HANDYNET** provides access to information on a European scale and hence in multilingual form, which is steadily extending to cover all technical aids.

Several "tools/resources" have been developed in this area:

- * Firstly, a factual and structured **database** which allows organisations in the different Member States to collect and process data concerning disabled people in accordance with a common procedure and framework.
- * An **electronic newsletter** supplements the database by providing the reader with recent information on events with a European impact and on the latest developments in the field of products, services, organisations or regulations. The newsletter also functions as a "notice board" for specific items of information.
- * An **electronic mail** facility is available to active partners in the system to guarantee the quality of the information collected and increase cooperation between the Member States.

The data acquired is stored on a "CD ROM" which can be accessed by the national "**data collection coordination centres**" appointed by the Member States. These centres then act as **relay stations, passing on the information to the public** in a manner determined at national level. The national data collection coordination centres work in close cooperation with the information and advice centres appointed by the Member States.

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UNITED KINGDOM

CONSUMER POLICY COMMITTEE OF BSI, THE UK STANDARDS BODY

BSI was one of the first national standards bodies to offer a role in the development of standards to consumers. Each BSI technical committee is expected to include representation of the consumer interest where the standard will relate to a product used by consumers or a process affecting them. The work of consumer representatives is coordinated by BSI's Consumer Policy Committee (CPC), which recruits members of the public and offers them training in standardization procedures and committee skills.

The terms of reference for the CPC are :

- To convey to the Board the interests of consumers in BSI activities;
- to be consulted on BSI policy decisions affecting those interests;
- to review the BSI standards programme in the light of those interests;
- to recommend to Standards Policy Committees the preparation of new standards or the revision or amendment of existing standards relevant to consumer needs, particularly in relation to health and safety;
- to contribute on behalf of consumers to the work of BSI in the fields of testing and quality assurance;
- to contribute on behalf of consumers, through its representatives, to the development of standards and certification systems in Western Europe and internationally, through CEN, CENELEC, ISO and IEC, and to participate in the work of COPOLCO;
- to represent BSI's consumer interest in related fora;
- to establish such sub-committees and panels as may seem appropriate at any time.

Its membership includes consumer organisations and government departments.

Consumer representatives are increasingly being included in UK delegations working on draft European standards. They attended 58 meetings abroad during 1992, 44 of which were concerned with the drafting of European or international standards.

Although European countries share similar cultures, there are subtle differences in expectations and priorities also in the area of standards. The opportunity to explore these differences is vital as is communication with consumers in other countries. Six other member bodies of CEN (Comité Européen de Normalisation) have set up consumer committees : Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands. The Commission funds a Secretariat in Brussels (SECO) to coordinate the work of observers nominated by the Consumer Consultative Council who serve on the technical committees of the European standards bodies. Liaison between SECO and the consumers working at national level allows European-wide consumer discussion on technical issues.

There is total agreement that safety should not be compromised, but a problem perceived in one country may not be a matter for concern in another, or the solutions sought may be different. The harmonization of standards requires give and take.

The Single Market offers manufacturers both challenge and potential reward, but consumers may as a result face changes in the products on sale to them. Their representatives have to be part of the discussion. Volunteers from the UK are already gaining experience and finding their discussions with consumer representatives in other countries enjoyable and worthwhile. They look forward to a widening circle of contacts being developed in the future.

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Fax +44/71/629.05.06

BELGIUM

SYMPOSIUM ON COMPETITION

On 18 March 1993, the Consumers' Organisations Research and Information Centre (CRIOC) held a symposium on consumers' interests and competition law.

The existence of European rules (specifically Articles 85 and 86 of the Treaty of Rome) is not sufficient to

prevent all attempts to frustrate competition. It is in the consumers' interest that such provisions be incorporated into national law.

The entry into force of a new Belgian law provided an opportunity to take stock of the situation with regard to competition in Europe. Among the papers read were those on the present position and future prospects in Germany and France. In Germany, while competition law is intended to benefit the consumer, it does not allow the national "watchdog" (Bundeskartellamt) or comparable bodies responsible for defending consumers' interests at regional level to act as vigorously as they might since the pertinent legislation is weak. The factor constraining such bodies is the lack of proof of collusion or abuse of market dominance. In France, on the other hand, there has been a rise in the number of complaints filed since the creation in 1986 of the "Conseil de la concurrence", which can, *inter alia*, impose financial penalties on companies.

The speakers repeatedly emphasised the part to be played by consumers' organisations in ensuring compliance with the new rules. While competition operates in very different ways in the various markets, it can always be greatly stimulated by the availability of information.

Further information:

CRIOC
Rue Souveraine, 28
B - 1050 BRUXELLES
Tel. +32/2/513.80.70
Fax +32/2/513.70.95

PHARMACEUTICAL RESEARCH ETHICS

The symposium was held in Brussels on 18 and 19 March 1993 and was jointly organised by the European Ethical Review Committee (EERC) and the European Forum for Good Clinical Practice (EFGCP) in collaboration with the Commission of the European Communities and the European Parliament. Its subject was "good practice and ethics in pharmaceutical research". The aim was thus to set ethical standards in the European Community for tests of pharmaceutical products carried out on volunteers and patients before they are

officially placed on the market. The purpose of such tests is to demonstrate the effectiveness and safety of these products for the future consumer.

Clinical tests comprise four phases, which always require the consent of the subject, whatever his status:

1. tests on healthy volunteers;
2. tests on patients;
3. tests on a larger number of patients as a final safeguard (it is during this phase that the firm applies for authorisation to market the product);
4. after the product has been placed on the market, checks with general practitioners who have prescribed it.

Various persons with a medical, pharmaceutical or legal background were invited to speak on the practice followed in their various countries. Contributions came from the European Community (speakers from the Commission), EFTA, northern and central Europe and the United States.

At Community level, there are two documents which formed a basis for discussion:

1. Directive 91/507/EEC on the approximation of the laws of Member States on standards for testing of medicinal products;
2. The July 1990 guide on the quality, safety and effectiveness of medicinal products for human use drawn up by the Committee for Proprietary Medicinal Products (CPMP), which in turn was established by Directive 75/319/EEC.

The main principle of "good clinical practice" is that testing on humans must be preceded by several preliminary stages for which the subject's consent is required after he has been properly informed of the test to be performed. These stages represent the required Community-level "standard" for the conduct and organisation of clinical tests.

A final topic considered was the difficult question of tests in special cases such as those on psychiatric and cancer patients. A further problem arises with regard

to tests on pregnant women, which are never performed for ethical reasons although patients in the same condition will use the products concerned once they are on the market.

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Fax +32/16/46.39.27

FRANCE

FRENCH CONSUMERS' RESOLUTION

On 3 December 1992, Mr Van Miert, the Member of the Commission who at that time was responsible for consumer policy in the European Community, met the French National Consumers' Council, chaired by Mrs Véronique Neiertz, State Secretary for Consumer Affairs. After hearing the Commission's views on European consumer policy, the Council made a statement, in the form of a resolution, on the principle of subsidiarity and Community consumer policy.

The French organisation "Asseco" has sent this text to the CPS for publication in **INFO-C** in order to make the position of French consumers clear to the other Member States.

Community consumer policy is currently pulled in two seemingly opposing directions: on the one hand, it is based on a high level of protection for the consumer, a concept incorporated into Article 100a of the Treaty by the Single European Act and echoed in Article 129a of the Treaty on European Union; on the other hand, its impact may be reduced, depending on how the principle of subsidiarity is interpreted.

It would clearly be wrong to question this principle, which determines the levels at which the Member States and the Community are competent to act and ensures the continuation of an independent consumer protection policy in France, where legislation in this field is generally in advance of that in the other Member States. This is how paragraph 3 of Article 129a: "Action pursuant to paragraph 2 shall not prevent any

Member State from maintaining or introducing more stringent protective measures" is interpreted by the French consumers' organisations.

However, Community initiatives for the benefit of the consumer must not be prevented by invoking the principle of subsidiarity indiscriminately, especially in view of developments (distance selling) requiring action whose objectives "cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved by the Community" (Treaty on European Union, Article 3b, on the principle of subsidiarity). For example, legal redress, information and the safety of consumers must not be excluded from the Community's area of competence. The problem of settling cross-frontier disputes involving consumers clearly illustrates the need for Community action. This is a prerequisite if consumers are to benefit fully from the Single Market.

Excessive divergence of national legislation on consumer protection would also be an obstacle to the completion of the Single Market. Only if there is a high level of protection for all European consumers can this objective be attained in accordance with Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, which states that the Community shall have the task of "raising of the standard of living and quality of life".

The French consumer organisations therefore urge that

- an active consumer policy should be pursued at Community level;
- the Consumer Policy Service, which ought eventually to become a separate directorate-general, should coordinate and develop this policy in concert with the consumer associations;
- this service should be provided with appropriate means of action.

Information :

ASSECO - CFDT
4, Bd de la Villette
F - 75955 Paris Cedex 19
Tel. +33/1/42.03.83.50
Fax +33/1/42.03.81.45.

ENERGY PACK

The "Centre Régional de la Consommation" in Lille, together with other regional bodies, has produced a teaching pack on the theme "Energy in the home". This contains original teaching aids designed for consumers' association trainers, training bodies, consumer schools and social workers, who will use the pack in information and training projects to enable consumers to control their energy costs in the home while maintaining safe and healthy conditions.

Further information:

Centre Régional de la Consommation
47 bis, rue Barthélémy Delespaul
F - 59000 Lille
Tel. +33/20/54.44.44
Fax +33/20/54.73.72

IRELAND

Ms Mary O'Rourke, T.D., the Irish Minister for Labour Affairs with responsibility for Consumer Rights, has launched a ten-week adult education course in consumer education.

The course, which will be on a pilot basis, will take place at venues in Thurles, Nenagh, Birr and the Liberties Vocational School Dublin.

Class times and full course details for each of the areas will be advertised locally.

This is the first step in the implementation of the Consumer Affairs section which is contained in the "Programme for a Partnership Government" of the recently-appointed Irish government.

The course, which was initiated by Minister O'Rourke, will cover broad, everyday consumer issues and their resolution, the working of the small-claims procedure in the District Court and other consumer-related matters such as misleading advertising, making complaints, the role of the Advertising Standards Authority and recent EC Directives on Consumer Safety.

The course has been prepared by Ms. Liz McShane of the curriculum development unit of Trinity College, Du-

blin with support from the Office of the Director of Consumer Affairs, the Consumers Association of Ireland and the Vocational Educational Committees in each of the pilot areas.

For further information please contact :

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Fax +353/1/660.67.63

Curriculum Development Unit
Trinity College
IRL - Dublin 2
Tel. +353/1/77.29.41
Fax +353/1/77.26.94

GERMANY

COMPARATIVE TESTING IN EUROPE

A seminar on comparative testing of consumer products was held in Berlin on March 25-26. The seminar was organised by the German foundation Stiftung Warentest, one of the central organisations in comparative product testing (c.p.t.). The Consumer Policy Service had supported the seminar financially because of the importance it attaches to c.p.t. as a means of consumer information.

Many consumer organisations carry out comparative tests and the majority of them cooperate in this field because it is complicated and costly (e.g. advanced laboratories are needed to attain sufficiently high standards in the testing methods). The most important co-operation body is International Consumer Research and Testing Ltd. (IT), based in London. But IT brings together mainly non-government or independent consumer organisations; there are other approaches to c.p.t. than those applied by the IT-organisations - which also differ from time to time on certain points.

This fact, however, creates a problem of credibility: If consumer organisations do not reach the same results in their testing, what are consumers to believe, and

how can you respond to challenges from industry that the tests or their results are wrong?

The aim of the seminar was to contribute towards the working out of joint rules and recommendations for c.p.t. Selected steps of the testing procedure were highlighted and differences in approach were discussed with an aim to prepare the ground for alignment or consensus building.

The seminar was open to all consumer organisations carrying out c.p.t, and a large number of consumer organisations from EC-, EFTA- and Eastern European countries participated

The seminar was considered a success by all participants and will be followed up by other seminars and cooperation efforts.

For further information please contact:

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Lützowplatz 11-13
D-1000 Berlin
Postfach 4141
Tel. +49/30/26.31.408
Fax +49/30/26.31.428

WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION

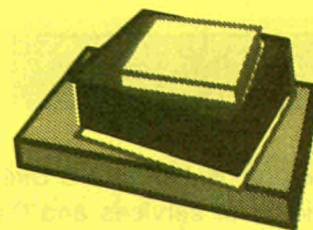
HANDLE LIFE WITH CARE!

The World Health Organisation (WHO) chose "injuries" as the theme of World Health Day on 7 April 1993. "Handle life with care - Prevent violence and negligence" was the slogan chosen to draw attention to this problem, which according to the WHO causes 3.5 million fatalities throughout the world. Of these, 2.5 million are the result of accidents on the roads, at home, at work or at sports grounds or of fires, drowning, poisoning and falling in addition to natural disasters. The other million deaths are intentional, resulting from acts of violence, suicides and murders. To mark this World Health Day, a round table was organised in Geneva to enable scientists and students to discuss what should be done to prevent such accidents. A game for people of all ages was also developed as a safety instruction aid.

Further information:

World Health Organisation
Injury prevention programme
Dr Claude Romer
CH - 1211 Geneva 27
Tel. +41/22/791.21.11
Fax +41/22/791.07.48

PUBLICATIONS AND AUDIOVISUAL



- * **"Consumers in Europe: your rights in the Single European Market"** is the title of a brochure published by the "Consumers in the European Community" Group (CECG), with the financial backing of the European Commission's Consumer Policy Service, for the use of British consumers visiting other Member States. It covers aspects such as the purchase of food and drink, watches and shoes where complications may arise. Also included are the problems associated with guarantees and the purchase of services in the Europe of the Twelve.

Another CECG publication is the 1992 Annual Report, a reference work for British consumer organisations, which covers a wide range of subjects and stresses the importance of Community decisions for consumers in the United Kingdom.

These publications can be obtained from:

CECG
24 Tufton Street
UK - London SW1P 3RB
Tel. +44/71/222.26.62
Fax +44/71/222.85.86

- * Financial operators have long been operating a European monetary strategy, but the role and place of consumers in these policies and in European legislation has not been made clear. For this reason the Consumers' Organisations' Research and Information Centre (CRIOC) recently produced a publication called **"Les consommateurs et l'Europe des services financiers"**, in collaboration with the European Commission's Consumer Policy Service. Based on the very high cost of "non-Europe", this book covers a variety of subjects and includes a preface by K. Van Miert, European Commissioner who used to be responsible for the protection and promotion of consumer interests, and Jean Allix, national expert in the Consumer Policy Service. The relationship between consumers and financial services in areas such as banking, means of payment, in-

surance, insolvency, etc. are covered. The book considers the level of consumer protection afforded under Community law and proposes possible reforms.

Price: Belgium: Bfrs 1500 (including VAT)
+ postage
Other countries: Bfrs 1415 (excluding VAT)
+ postage

Information may be obtained from:

CRIOC
Rue Souveraine, 28
B - 1050 BRUXELLES
Tel. +32/2/513.80.70
Fax +32/3/513.70.95

- * **"Group action and consumer protection"** is published, in a bilingual version (French/English only) by the consumer rights centre of the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve.

In order to overcome the problems associated with individual action, it suggests "consolidating and considerably extending the right of the groups responsible for consumer protection to take legal action, to protect both the collective interest of consumers and the individual interests of their members". It is particularly important for them to have this right if there is litigation across borders.

The book relates experiences and lists sources of collective action already in place in a number of countries (Netherlands, France, Northern Europe, Brazil, etc. and Europe as a whole) as presented, in the form of papers, at a conference on group action organised by the consumer rights centre in 1990.

Price: Bfrs 2456 + postage

The consumer rights centre's second publication covers **"the liability of providers of services and health care"**. It first analyses the content and scope

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of the proposal for an EC Directive on the liability of providers of services and then asks whether this proposal for a directive can be applied to the health care sector.

Price: Bfrs 1150 + postage

Both books can be obtained from:

Centre de droit de la consommation
Place des Doyens, 1
B - 1348 Louvain-La-Neuve
Tel. +32/10/47.85.31
Fax +32/10/47.85.32

-
- * The Region of Piedmont has just published a brochure on door-to-door sales, "**di porta in porta**". The brochure, which forms part of a consumer information series covering a variety of subjects, outlines the rights of the citizens of this region, including their right to withdraw from a contract. It also explains how Directive 85/577/EEC on the subject is incorporated into the 1992 Italian Decree.

The brochure is distributed free of charge by:

Segreteria dell'Consulta regionale per la difesa e tutela del consumatore
Nicoletta Ricci
P.zza S. Giovanni 4
I - Torino
Tel. +39/11/432.25.12

-
- * The Consumer Research Institute, SWOKA (Netherlands), has just produced a publication called "**new biotechnology products and associated legislation**". Biotechnology involves genetic engineering in the agricultural sector (accelerated and increased production) and the food industry (e.g. rapid fermentation processes). New products are now coming on to the market without being subject to the appropriate legislation. SWOKA informs consumers about these products (safety, health, freedom of choice, ethical aspects, quality and price) and urges strict control of labelling.

The publication is available in Dutch and costs 45 guilders.

Further information can be obtained from:

SWOKA
Alexanderstraat 14
NL - 2514 JL DEN HAAG
Tel. +31/70/346.92.25
Fax +31/70/360.39.63

-
- * In the context of preventive information of consumers on questions specific to transfrontier operations, the Montpellier Centre Technique Régional de la Consommation (which comprises the consumer associations of Languedoc-Roussillon) has published two brochures entitled "**Achat d'un véhicule automobile en Espagne**" (Purchasing a motor car in Spain) and "**La vente à distance en Espagne**" (Distance selling in Spain). The presentation is simple and attractive; each theme is dealt with under several rubrics: "regulations", "information", "guarantees", redress in the event of "disputes", "list of consumer associations" on both sides of the frontier. The aim is to inform consumers about regulations and practice in each domain, so that they can enter contracts in full confidence.

These brochures were created by the CTRC in co-operation with the Institut Català del Consum (Spain), with assistance from the EC and the Languedoc-Roussillon Region. They can be obtained free of charge (postage extra) **from:**

C.T.R.C. Languedoc-Roussillon
18, Rue Marceau - B.P. 2123
F - 34026 MONTPELLIER CEDEX 1
Tel. +33/67.92.63.40
Fax +33/67.92.64.67

-
- * The OECD has recently published a report on "**Bio-technology, Agriculture and Food**" which gives a broad overview of numerous scientific and technical opportunities offered by agro-food biotechnology to producers and consumers. Policy-makers will have to consider the industrial constraints on the development of the new technologies, the often hesitant reaction of public opinion and the likely long-term economic consequences of agro-food biotechnology - three issues which are all analysed in this report.

The publication explains how scientific and technical progress in biotechnology is likely to affect the agro-food system and the environment. It is addressed not only to specialists but also to all those who are interested in the potential impact of this widening technology.

Journalists may obtain copies from:

DIVISION DE LA PRESSE DE L'OCDE

2, Rue André Pascal

F - 75775 PARIS CEDEX 16

Tel. +33/1/45.24.80.88

Fax +33/1/45.24.80.03

Other individuals may obtain these studies through the OECD sales outlet in their country, whose address can be had from the Paris office mentioned above.

Sale price: 185 FF

-
- * Poisoning is a frequent cause of accidents involving children. This is why the Luxembourg Consumers' Association (Union Luxembourgeoise des Consommateurs) and the European Consumer Information Centre decided to publish a brochure on this topic, with the support of the Commission of the European Communities. The aim of this publication is not to present this problem "as an unavoidable phenomenon but, on the contrary, to further sensitise parents, teachers and adolescents to the inherent risks, by helping them understand the child's development mechanisms and by a detailed description of the most frequent poison hazards".

Price: 50 FL (Luxembourg)

100 FL (abroad)

The brochure is available in French only and can be ordered from:

Union Luxembourgeoise des Consommateurs

55, Rue des Bruyères

L - 1274 HOWALD

Tel. +352/49.60.22

Fax +352/49.49.57

- * The children's strip cartoon recently published by ASSECO-CFDT in the series "Ouvrons l'œil" is entitled "La maison" (The Home). It features the kindly Oncle Chouette (Uncle Owl), symbol of the Groupe Chouette, a group of five consumers' organisations (ASSECO-CFDT, ADEIC-FEN, CSF, FAMILLES RURALES and UFCS) which carry out domestic accident prevention campaigns under this name. This latest publication is one such campaign and is a collection of thirty or so amusing stories in which the characters are victims of domestic accidents. Each story is followed by a few words of information or advice.

Children aged between 6 and 10 years and grown-ups alike will take great pleasure and interest in reading this cartoon. The book is published with the aid of the EEC and is available, price FF 40, **from:**

ASSECO-CFDT

4, Boulevard de la Villette

75955 PARIS CEDEX 19

Tel. +33/1/42.03.83.50

Fax +33/1/42.03.81.44 or 45

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- * The Central Transport Consultative Committee, the rail users' watchdog has published a leaflet explaining the role and activities of the CTCC regional bodies, the Transport Users Consultative Committees (TUCC).

Copies have been supplied to Citizen's Advice Bureaux, public libraries and other locations where they are available to the travelling public.

The Transport Users Consultative Committees were set up by Parliament to be independent watchdogs protecting rail users' interests. There are eight T.U.C.s nationwide - one for each of six regions of England and one each for Scotland and Wales. They have the power to recommend changes in British Rail practice, both locally, and, through the Central Committee, on a national scale; they regularly discuss the service and policy issues affecting their area with British Rail.

T.U.C.s have a special responsibility to consider passengers' objections to any plans by British Rail to close a station or line. They have to report to Go-

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vernment on any hardship that closure would cause and may make suggestions to alleviate this.

T.U.C.C. members represent a wide cross-section of rail users including commuters, business travellers, senior citizens and people with disabilities.

For further information please contact :

CTCC

Golden Cross House

Duncannon street

London WC2N 4JF

Tel. +44/71/839.73.38

+44/71/930.13.04

Fax +44/71/925.22.28

* The Consumer Safety Commission has just published its **"8th Report to the President of the Republic and to Parliament"**. This report covers details of referrals, opinions and communiqués issued or published (for basically preventive purposes) in 1992. It also introduces topics for consideration (relations with the institutional and legal authorities, certification and safety) and a global communication policy.

The publication is available in French and costs FF 100.

Further information can be obtained from:

Direction des Journaux Officiels

26, rue Desaix

F - 75727 Paris Cedex 15

Tel. +33/1/40.58.76.00

Fax +33/1/40.58.77.80

The Washington based Food Marketing Institute (FMI) in cooperation with The International Center for Companies of the Food Trade and Industry of Paris (known under its French acronym CIES), financially supported by the Coca Cola Company, have published a survey **"Trends in Europe : Consumer Attitudes and the Supermarket 1992"**.

The study covers consumer attitudes and behaviour in the 12 EC-countries and the EFTA-countries Austria, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland.

It covers items such as shopping practices (who does the shopping, which shops for which products), shoppers views of the supermarket, views on nutrition and food safety, packaging, recycling and environmental matters, family grocery expenses and eating out; finally six segments of consumers are identified, based on behavioural and attitudinal profiles.

For further information :

CIES

Marco M. Thyssen

61, Quai d'Orsay

F - 75007 Paris

Tel. +33/1/47.05.48.43

Fax +33/1/45.51.59.83

Food Marketing Institute

Judith Kozacik

800 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.

Washington, DC 20006

USA

Tel. +202/429.82.73

Fax +202/429.45.29

The UK National Consumer has recently published, with the financial support of the Consumer Policy Service, a 120-page **Directory** of Consumer Advice Services in the European Community. It contains an overview for each country plus a profile of 43 organizations giving advice to consumers :

The Directory has been widely distributed to interested bodies but there is a limited stock (French, English, German and Spanish) still available.

Copies may be obtained, free of charge, from :

National Consumer Council

20, Grosvenor Gardens

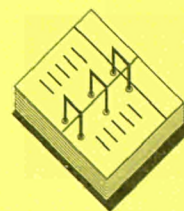
London

SWIW ODH

Tel. +44/71/730.34.69

Fax +44/71/730.01.91

Diary



3 and 4 June

"Product labelling in the Internal Market : Experiences and Perspectives". Following the adoption by the Council of a resolution on labelling on the initiative of the Danish presidency (see elsewhere in this issue of Info-C) a conference will be held in Copenhagen, the purpose of which is to establish a dialogue between the parties interested in labelling, aiming at identifying, through the exchange of experience as, areas of agreement and disagreement; the end result should form the basis for forward-looking action.

Further information from:

Dansk Varefakta Nævn
(Danish Institute for Informative Labelling)
Amagerfælledvej 56
DK - 2300 Copenhagen 5
Tel. +45/32/96.13.32
Fax +45/32/96.08.32

16 and 17 June 1993

Reminder: Conference on "Consumers left behind in a Europe without frontiers - A priority for consumer policy?" in Rotterdam (see **INFO-C** No 6).

Further information from:

Planpraktijk Dynamic Assistance
Jet Creemers
Stationsweg 147
NL - 2515 Den Haag
Tel. +31/70/389.13.40
Fax +31/70/388.97.42

15 to 28 July 1993

"Community law in the field of consumer affairs" - summer course organised annually by the Faculty of Law at the Université Catholique de Louvain, with the assistance of the Commission of the European Communities. 58-hour programme of courses and seminars intended for officials, those representing consumers' interests, lawyers, solicitors or consultants, judges, teachers, researchers, etc. working or wishing to specialise in the field of consumer affairs. Number of participants limited to 45. Closing date for applications: 30 June 1993.

Venue: Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium)

Further information from:

Centre de droit de la consommation
Place des Doyens 1
B-1348 Louvain-la-Neuve
Tel. +32/10/47.85.31
Fax +32/10/47.85.32

November 1993

The European Consumer Safety Association (ECOSA) will organise a conference on research into product safety, in association with the Commission of the European Communities. The date and venue of this conference, which will be the follow-up to a study day held in April 1992, have not yet been finalised by ECOSA but it will probably be a two-day conference in November 1993 in Amsterdam (NL). ECOSA invites researchers from numerous fields, representatives of legislative bodies dealing with product safety/standardisation and consumers' organisations who wish to present their research or studies on this occasion to contact it before 1 June 1993.

Further information from:

ECOSA Secretariat
Willem van Weperen
PO Box 75169
NL - 1070 AD Amsterdam
Tel. +31/20/511.45.11
Fax +31/20/511.45.10

Only those readers who have not yet asked for their (free) subscription to INFO-C, are invited to fill in the reply-coupon(s) below. However, if you have already sent in a request, we should be grateful if you would check your name and address on the label of this bulletin and inform us of any errors or of any changes in your address in order that your copy arrives without delay.

Commission of the European Communities
Mr J. Ring
Consumer Policy Service
Rue de la Loi, 200
B - 1049 Bruxelles



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