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J C I C N E W S (VOL.10 NO.1)

- . **From The Results: Electric Kettles**
 - . **Watch Out for Misleading Sales Tactics While Sightseeing in Traditional Tourist City: "I Thought It Was Tourist Information Guide."**
 - . **Serious Injuries Related To Automatic Doors**
 - . **Privacy on the Internet**
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. From The Results: Electric Kettles

Electric kettles are being made in larger sizes recently, and many models provide a feature which makes it possible for the user to select a temperature level to keep depending upon the use, and some even come with a filtering function that removes chloric acid from the water. JCIC tested nine brands of 3-liter size electric kettles.

1. Safety

With all of the brands tested, the user needs to pay attention to the steam outlet while the water is boiling to avoid getting burned. But with some brands, while the user is dispersing hot water, hot steam comes out from a little opening in the lid, and may scald the hand. There are also some brands that could leak hot water if dropped or when set on an uneven surface.

2. Boiling and, temperature-keeping capabilities

We checked the time and the cost to boil water in these kettles. The greater the electric consumption of the kettle, the faster it could boil water; and some 19 to 30 minutes on average was required. The cost of electricity was between ¥7 and ¥9 to boil a kettle-ful of water. For comparison, when we used a regular stove-top tea kettle with a 3-liter capacity and heated it with gas, it took 14 minutes and cost about ¥6.

The conventional type of kettle was more economical than the electric kettles.

With those electric kettles which the user can set a temperature to keep, it took at least 1 hour and 20 minutes from the boiling point to a "moderately hot temperature" (75 to 90 °C) even for the kettles with the shortest time.

If the user sets the kettle to keep a lower temperature of 60 °C, for example, some of these electric kettles took as much as 6 hours before cooling down to that level from the boiling temperature.

3 . Economy

To keep the water warm, as well as to boil it, these kettles use electricity. So, if it boils water twice a day, and keeps it at a high temperature, the total electricity consumption in one-month period will be around 52 to 62kWh. This is more than the total electricity consumed by a large, 400-liter refrigerator in one month. Considering the electricity cost, it would be more economical to set it to keep a lower temperature. Or, if you use it less frequently, it's better to use a regular tea kettle on gas burner.

4 . Ease of use

When we tested these brands of electric kettles for ease and convenience, our evaluations differed as to how easy it was to read the full-water line and water level gauge, as well as on the method used to inform the user when the water comes to the boil.

The brand that had a filtering capability to remove chloric acid managed to remove more than 60% of chlorine. A point to keep in mind, however, is that even without using this function, normal boiling removes more than 50% of the chlorine in the water. In fact, after five minutes of boiling, the amount of chlorine fall by 60 to 70%, and after 30 minutes of boiling some 85 to 95% is removed.

. Watch Out for Misleading Sales Tactics While Sightseeing in Traditional Tourist City:

“I Thought It Was Tourist Information Guide.”

The misleading sales method where hawkers call out to passers-by, take them to an office, and induce them to sign a merchandise purchase contract, is often called the "catch sales" method, a term coined in Japan.

"Catch sales" is aimed at people who have no intention to buy entirely, nor realize that they are being urged to do so. The Law Concerning Door-to-Door Sales is applicable, and consumers entrapped in these schemes are entitled to a cooling-off period.

Operators using the "catch sales" method have been taking aim at tourists who visit the ancient capital of Kyoto.

They approach unsuspecting tourists on the pretext of serving as a well-intentioned tour guide, take them to workshops and other places in order to sell them high-priced kimono. This type of unethical sales method has been increasing. The number of complaints received by the consumer information centers has topped 150 cases.

More recently, some of these hawkers pretend to be walking their dog, presumably in order to create a friendlier, more familiar atmosphere.

Some typical patterns of complaints:

[1] While touring Kyoto, a consumer was approached by a stranger who offered to "take a photograph." With this as an opener, she was enticed with statements such as "Wouldn't you like to visit the studio of a Yuzen dyeing artist who has been designated a national living treasure." "Would you like me to guide you to a Kyoto Yuzen workshop?" ("Yuzen" is a traditional style of dyeing kimono.)

After the consumer follows this "guide," she receives an explanation of the history of Yuzen dyeing and kimono from the people at the studio. And a "try-one-on" service is offered to allow the consumer to even wear the kimono and be photographed in it.

[2] As this goes on, there begins some talk of whether the consumer might not wish to buy it. "We can arrange to get you a one-million yen kimono for half that price." "We can sell this to you at the wholesale price, only a fraction of the market price." "We can dye a kimono especially for you, a one-of-a-kind, in the entire world," and so on. Gradually, the atmosphere that is created makes the consumer feel that she would be cheating herself if she did not sign a contract. It becomes increasingly difficult to say, "No," and she ends up signing.

[3] After returning home from the trip, she realizes that "Thinking more about it, I really don't need a kimono, and it was far too expensive to begin with." "After I told my family about it, they opposed the whole idea." And so, she contacts the Consumer Information Center for counseling.

All the consumers who have been victimized by this scheme are women, averaging 25 years in age, with the average purchase amount of ¥590,000. Most of the counseling cases concern their desire to "cancel the contract."

JCIC is calling for the public's to be aware of this new "catch sales" scheme that is going on in traditional tourist city.

. Serious Injuries Related To Automatic Doors

In Japan, automatic doors are installed at the entrances of many stores, banks, public facilities, hospitals, and other buildings, and they are much more widely used than in other countries. In fact, there are about 1,600,000 automatic doors in operation across the country at present.

The potential hazards of these automatic doors are not well known. However, JCIC has received significant numbers of injury reports related to automatic doors, such as being caught by the doors and injuries caused by broken door glass.

1. Many injuries involve a person being caught by the automatic door

Between April 1993 and November 1997, the "Consumer Injury Information System" of JCIC received 76 reports of injuries related to automatic doors.

Of these injuries, the largest number, 44 cases, were "being caught by the automatic doors", while 26 cases involved consumers bumping into the automatic door, and 3 cases involved consumers "falling down after tripping over the sill or on the change in level on the interior side of automatic door.

2 . There Are No Specific Safety Standards for Automatic Doors

Even though automatic doors are widely used by a large number of people, there are only safety standards set by the door-manufacturing industry itself. These are no legally binding safety standards.

Also, several different makers may be involved in producing the various structural parts such as the moving part, door sash, etc. In other words, it is a product made with parts produced by a number of makers. Also, because it is a part of the building, businesses engaged in the building design and construction are involved as well.

Because various types of businesses are involved, when an accident occurs, the party responsible for dealing with injuries is likely to be unclear.

3 . Care and Ingenuity Needed for a Safe Structure

Furthermore, there are some problems with the structure of automatic doors, such as the adjustment of the speed of opening and closing, and the narrow range of sensor detection. Since factors such as age and disability influence walking speed and response time, it is certainly desirable that makers improve the safety of automatic doors.

Also, there are problems with the door glass as well. Most automatic doors with a frame are made of float sheet glass, which can shatter into sharp pieces.

Moreover, because the door glass is entirely transparent, it is hard to recognize when the door is closed. If a person bumps into it and the glass breaks, it can cause serious injury.

Therefore, it is extremely necessary for makers to use either composite glass or reinforced glass, to provide greater safety if it breaks.

Businesses that install automatic doors should make sure to post signs that call for users' caution, as well as signs and markings to make glass doors more visible to users.

. Privacy on the Internet

The fact that there is no comprehensive supervising body for the Internet and that it is open to anyone to access and use, is one of its advantages and distinctive characteristics.

However, when information related to individuals on the Internet is used illegitimately, then, the absence of a supervising body and its openness can become a source of trouble as well.

At present, the Internet users always face the possibility that their individual private information

may be stolen and that such information may be disseminated rapidly. Also, because such illegitimate activities are conducted using electronic data, no physical evidence may remain, and it is extremely difficult to trace and identify the perpetrators. These factors generally make it difficult to solve the problems.

Counseling related to individual private information on the Internet has been increasing recently.

1. Typical Internet-related counseling cases

Internet-related counseling can be divided broadly into (1) cases where economic damage results from theft and illegitimate use of a password or credit card number, and (2) cases where individuals' private information is made public on Internet, or where they are personally abused or defamed on the Internet. The ratio of these two categories is about half and half.

Examples of damages resulting from theft and illegitimate use of a password or credit card number include: [1] cases where consumers are billed for merchandise they never ordered, and [2] cases where they are billed provider service fees for services that they never used.

Cases where individual private information is made public on Internet and where individuals are personally defamed and/or abused include: Cases where a person's name and telephone number are listed on a website with pornographic content which results in obnoxious telephone calls and letters from unknown senders.

2. Examples of counseling:

- A consumer has a contract with a provider with a fixed rate for up to 7.5 hours of use per month, and after becoming a subscriber, she never used it more than the fixed amount of time. However, "the system which cuts off the connection automatically when the user uses it for a long time" operated, and there was a billing for forty hours of use for that month. The provider, too, acknowledged the possibility that the user's name and ID may have been stolen. Up then, the consumer had never changed her ID. She does not want to pay the portion of the bill for the illegitimately used service. (30-years-old female salaried worker)

- A consumer is deeply troubled with silent telephone calls, as well as obnoxious and obscene telephone calls every day. From one of the obnoxious callers, she learned that her full name and home telephone number along with pornographic messages are posted on a website on the Internet, and that callers got the information from there. She had so many bothersome calls every day she wanted to change her telephone number, but because her family runs a business, it would be very difficult to do. (24-years-old female salaried worker)

3. Advice to consumers

(1) Unfortunately, theft of an ID and password cannot be prevented by exercising caution alone.

However, consumers should be careful with regard to the following points:

- Change your password often.
 - Now and then make a note of the length of time you use on service.
 - Never let anyone know your credit card number. If you want to use your credit card on the Internet, check the content of the security system used. If you do not understand or cannot find out how the security system on the network functions, it is better not to send your credit card number.
 - If you have trouble with a provider or mail-order business, contact the nearest consumer information center, or other appropriate organization, for counseling and advice.
- (2) It is impossible at present to prevent one's private information from becoming public on the Internet, or to prevent personal defamation or abuse on Internet. If a consumer is victimized and suffers damages, notify the police.