

DEC . 1998

J C I C N E W S (VOL.10 NO.2)

- . **Results of Product Tests : Portable Dishwashers**
 - . **Be Careful of Advertisements for "Home-based Work with Wordprocessor"**
 - . **Powder-spray Type Sterilizer/Disinfectant May Make the Injury Worse**
 - . **Results of Investigation of Accidents Involving Babies and Small Children Inside the Car**
 - **With the main focus on child safety seats**
-

. Results of Product Tests : Portable Dishwashers

In Japan, dishwasher machines have not been used very widely in the past. However, in recent years, compact - size dishwashers have been released in the market, and total sales have been growing significantly. JCIC recently carried out tests of five brands of portable dishwashers for use by families of about four persons priced at about ¥60,000 (U.S.\$480 to \$560), in terms of the washing capability, economy, ease of use, etc.

1 . Cleansing capability

All of these brands were able to wash flat dishes in a fairly satisfactory manner. However, they could not completely wash off and clean deep items such as glasses, cups and bowls, and small items such as chopsticks, which made it necessary to do some washing by hand.

About 70 to 80% of dishes and utensils were washed so clean that they could simply be put away without any further work, while 50 to 60% of glasses and small items were washed well provided that they were dirty to the normal extent. When dishes and utensils had been left unwashed for a while, then they were not cleansed so well.

Thus, if the user is not going to wash dishes right away, it is necessary to soak them in water.

2 . Drying function

In terms of drying function, all brands of dishwashers dried large dishes and utensils well so that there was hardly any water left. However, with some brands, some water remained on bowls, cups, and glasses.

3 . Economy

Annual cost of the dishwashers was calculated based upon the amount of water used, type of

cleanser used, and amount of electricity and gas consumption, both when warm water of 40 and cold water was used. Overall, there was no significant difference in the cost.

However, the operating time was shorter when warm water was used.

4 . Environment factor

It is not easy to evaluate the impact of using dishwashers on the environment. Here, the testers compared the impact on the environment, particularly river water and air, based upon the amount of water, electricity, gas, and cleanser used in washing dishes by dishwasher with washing by hand.

Based upon the amount of water used and the amount of surfactant used, it was found that washing dishes by hand required about 36 liters of water per wash, while a dishwasher required about 17 liters per wash on the average. So clearly, dishwashers place less load upon water resources.

Also, dishwashers used less surfactant (contained in the detergent) than dish washing by hand. On the other hand, when the CO₂ emission volume was computed, dish washing by hand had less impact than the amount emitted by dishwashers running on electricity or gas.

5 . Hygienic cleanliness

In order to check the hygienic cleanliness of eating utensils and equipment, we put some minced meat on a cutting board, and washed it with the dishes.

There were large amounts of general bacteria and colon bacilli on the minced meat, but no bacteria were detected on any dishes, cutting board, or inside the equipment with any of the brands tested. The reason is probably that bacteria are washed off, and sterilized in the inside temperature which reaches 64 - 79 , and the operating time of 1 to 1.5 hours.

6 . Advice to consumers

While the dishwasher will wash dishes and utensils, the user must take care of the dishwasher. Also, the number of persons mentioned in the catalog as the yardstick figure for the number of dishes and utensils that the dishwasher can hold, is based on flat dishes.

While a dishwasher can save considerable washing and drying of flat dishes, it is better to wash glasses, cups and bowls by hand. Also, it may not be possible to put in all the deep utensils for all persons.

Therefore, when you buy a dishwasher, you should consider the family make-up, the shapes of dishes and utensils that your family use, as well as the kitchen space.

. Be Careful of Advertisements for "Home-based Work with Wordprocessor"

There has been a sharp increase in inquiries and counseling cases related to home-based work using wordprocessors.

Most of these cases involve solicitation by telephone and fliers inserted in the morning newspaper.

In some cases, "the inquiring consumer was induced to buy an expensive wordprocessor, but no work was referred to her." This and various other types of troubles have been occurring, and JCIC urges consumers to be very careful about these types of solicitation.

1 . Number of counseling cases

Up to FY1992, there were fewer than 100 of such cases per year, but the number began to increase significantly in FY1993. During the five-year period between FY1993 and FY1997, more than 5,000 inquiries of this category were received.

By sex breakdown, women make up 89% of the consumers making inquiries. By age grouping, 57% of the inquiring consumers are in their 20's, and 34% are in 30's, with these two age groups accounting for 91% of the total. The average contract amount was about ¥395,000 (about U.S.\$3,160).

2 . Typical situation leading up to the trouble

(1) There is a telephone solicitation to the effect that "if you purchase a specially prepared wordprocessor and pass the test, you will be able to make about ¥80,000 to ¥100,000 (about \$640 to \$800) per month. Or, the consumer receives a flier advertisement claiming that "Even a beginner can earn a high income with this business at home."

(2) Thinking that a definite amount of "work will be referred to her" so that she "can earn a good income," the consumer signs a contract for purchasing a wordprocessor machine, study materials, and/or a wordprocessor training course, etc., and makes various payments called "guarantee money," "enrollment fee," and so on.

(3) However, "no work is referred to her," nor can she receive the "kind of income that was explained as likely," and often "cannot contact the business operator." This is how the trouble occurs.

3 . Advice to consumers

(1) It is not correct to think that one can obtain a high income with home-based work using a wordprocessor.

Consumers should not trust any business operator who tries to induce them to make payments

under various pretexts beforehand, operators who easily promise a high income, and operators who urge consumers to make payments quickly.

(2) Remember that you can use the cooling-off period (mandated by law), which is applicable to telemarketing of contracts for wordprocessors, wordprocessor software and training materials, and wordprocessor training courses.

(3) Contact the Consumer Information Center near you immediately.

. Powder-spray Type Sterilizer/Disinfectant May Make the Injury Worse

The powder-type spray sterilizer/disinfectant is gaining popularity recently as a sterile solution which does not sting and is handy to use. When you apply this powder-type sterilizer to a wound, powder sticks to the wound opening and dries the area. It differs from the conventional type of sterilizer/disinfectant precisely by this function of drying the wound area, and it contains acrinol for sterilizing and zinc oxide as the astringent agent for the wound. Also, it contains liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) as spray gas agent.

In less than six years since this type of product was first released, 15 million units have been sold. It is applied to cuts and abrasions, and it has the effect of sterilizing and sanitizing the wound area.

However, there have been reports that this type of sterilizing/disinfectant medicine "made the sore worse" and "caused frostbite," etc. As of May 31, 1998, 31 cases have been referred to JCIC's hazard information system.

1 . Details of the accidents

The details of the reported accidents were as follows: "The wound became infected; the wound became worse" accounted for 25 cases, "frostbite (low-temperature burns)" 5 cases, "the nail came off, nail broke off" 1 case.

< **Example 1** > : The inquiring consumer's grandson fell, and hurt his knee. The spray product was used four times over a two-day period. The wound became reddish and swollen, resulting in severe pain. When the child was examined at the hospital, they were told: "This medicine not only sterilizes the wound but also dries the wound area. Thus, bacteria are not killed off, but become trapped inside, and it becomes infected." The child is now applying another medicine to the wound, and is taking an antibiotic medicine.

< **Example 2** > : The user had an abrasion, and so applied the spray on the leg, but the condition then deteriorated. It became all bluish and infected, and when he went to the doctor, he was told: "The spray holds in the bacteria, which breed and multiply inside the body." By using this

spray, the initial wound became worse, and the inquiring consumer is receiving outpatient treatment.

< *Example 3* > : When the inquiring consumer used the powder-spray type sterilizer on his face, the area became similar to a burn (frostbite). There was no warning not to use it on the face.

2 . Cautions on Use

(1) It is necessary to thoroughly wash off and clean the wound area of dirt and blood, and then wipe off any remaining water with a clean gauze, and finally use the powder-spray type sterilizer. If the wound area is not washed and cleaned completely, there is a danger that it may become infected. Because the powder-spray type sterilizer covers up the wound area, if it is not washed and cleaned thoroughly, the powder spray traps the bacteria inside the wound.

(2) Do not apply too much spray on one spot. The LP gas in the spray has a strong cooling effect, and so if a lot of spray is applied to the same spot, it may cause frostbite.

(3) When you apply it the second time, wipe off the solidified part from the previous application completely. The powder-spray type covers up the wound area, and so if one application does not prove effective and you apply it a second time without removing the solidified remnant, there is no sterilizing effect and bacteria may increase in number.

(4) Do not apply it if your wound requires you to see a doctor. This sterilizer contains an ingredient (zinc oxide) which blocks X rays making it harder to examine the condition of the wound. If the wound is serious enough to be seen by a doctor, you should not use this sterilizer before medical examination and treatment.

(5) Use it only after reading the claims on its effectiveness carefully. If you use this sterilizer incorrectly, there is a high risk of an accident or injury. Read the claims carefully before use.

. Results of Investigation of Accidents Involving Babies and Small Children Inside the Car

- With the main focus on child safety seats

According to the statistics on traffic accidents, accidents involving babies and small children inside the car have been increasing recently period. In particular, the ratio of accidents leading to death and serious injury is very much higher when babies and small children are not in a child safety seat.

Despite this, the ratio of children using a child safety seat has remained only around several percentage points. JCIC investigated accidents involving babies and small children inside the car, and studied the structure, labeling and other factors of child safety seats. Based on the results of this investigation, we have requested the relevant government agencies to make the use of child safety

seats mandatory (it is not obligatory at present), and requested the makers to improve the quality and labeling of child safety seats.

1 . From consumer counseling cases

Counseling cases referred to consumer centers across Japan regarding accidents involving babies and small children riding in cars include a large number of falls from the seat, or crushes against the window, and it is clear that most of these types of accidents could have been prevented by using child safety seats.

There were also inquiries and counseling cases related to the child safety seat itself, including cases concerning safety: "The metal fittings for the buckle became hot, causing burns," "the belt rolled around the child's neck," "The whole child safety seat fell off with the child in it while the car was moving," and others. Also, there were inquiries regarding the method of installation and use. "I tried to install the child safety seat in the car, but the seat would not fit. "When I bought a new car, I found that the present seat was no longer suitable for the new car," and so on.

2 . Results of test on the suitability of child safety seat and the car

Some problems occur with installation because there are discrepancies either with the car and/or child safety seat involved. "We bought a child safety seat but could not install it in our car," "No matter how I installed the child safety seat, it rattles and cannot be installed securely," etc. Therefore, JCIC purchased 10 brands of child safety seat produced by 8 companies, and checked whether they can be installed safely, and whether the handling instructions present no problems, etc.

The main results of our test are as follows: [1] The buckle belts of some cars were too long for the child safety seat to be installed. [2] The seat depth and/or shape of some cars were such that the child safety seat could not be installed properly. [3] There were some discrepancies between the handling instructions of the child safety seat and the car.

3 . Questionnaire survey related to labeling for suitability of child safety seat and car

JCIC carried out a questionnaire survey among automobile makers and child safety seat makers. Both types of maker are aware that in some cases a child safety seat and automobile seat do not suit one another. While child safety seat makers point out possible unsuitability due to the position and length of the safety belt, automobile makers merely point out lack of suitability for sports cars and minicars. Thus, there was a discrepancy regarding lack of suitability. Also, some automobile makers and child safety seat makers are not at all aware of lack of suitability, or who do not place specific labels regarding the matter.

4 . Request and advice

In order to prevent accidents involving babies and small children while riding in a car, to prevent serious accidents, and to prevent a child from falling off inside the car, JCIC insists that a law requiring the use of child safety seats should be established. In order to ensure that such a law on the mandatory use of child safety seats is truly effective, it is necessary to increase the level of safety provided by child safety seats in a car crash, to prevent metal buckle fittings from getting hot, etc.

Based upon these considerations, JCIC issued a request for discussion on the need to pass a law for mandatory use of child safety seats and measures for increasing the level of safety to the National Police Agency, Ministry of Transport, and other government agencies, as well as automobile makers' organizations and automobile parts makers' groups in July 1998.

Also, JCIC has given the following advice to consumers:[1] When you drive a car with a baby or small child inside always put the child in the child safety seat. [2] When you buy a child safety seat, check carefully that the seat you are about for buy is suitable for your car. [3] It is extremely important to follow the handling instructions and labeling carefully with regard to the position for installing the child safety seat. In particular, after placing the child in the safety seat, check that the buckle is locked properly.

The National Police Agency subsequently announced that they would seek a law that makes the use of child safety seats mandatory, in November of this year (1998).