



NCAC NEWS

From
National Consumer Affairs Center of Japan
Vol.18 No. 4 ***November 2006***

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A girl sustained severe injury to her fingers from a home paper shredder

In Japan, paper shredders used to be commonly recognized as “office equipment” and were rarely used at home. Nevertheless, the necessity of shredding paper at home has been increasing due to the mounting awareness regarding personal information protection as well as the growing number of SOHOs (Small Office Home Offices). Paper shredders have become increasingly popular as manufacturers have begun to lay stress on the sales of domestic paper shredders in response to the growing demand.

With this being the situation, a local consumer center received accident information in March 2006 that “a girl’s fingers had been pulled into a paper shredder whereby nine of them were cut off.” Given the seriousness of this accident, NCAC engaged in the following activities: 1) a paper shredder test; 2) an examination of overseas publications and case studies; and 3) providing information for consumers relating to the safety of paper shredder products and also making requests to the industry and the government. The outline of these activities is described below:

○ Test results

The product test involved products of 16 electric paper shredder brands. These test products, which were purchased from general appliance dealers, differed in the number of pieces of paper they shredded at a time and had different cutting methods. In this product test, imitation fingers matching in size to those of infants were used in order to verify the risk of a paper shredder pulling in the fingers and cutting them off.

As a result of this product test, 7 out of the 16 test brands were discovered to have the potential to pull in and cut off the imitation fingers. These 7 products all had the following characteristics that could cause accidents:

- They had a wide shredder opening and therefore an infant’s fingers could easily be placed in.
- An infant could easily put his/her fingers into the opening as these products were meant to be placed on the floor.
- The distance between the shredder opening and the shredder cutter of these products was small which could consequently cause an injury to an infant’s fingers.
- An infant’s fingers could be pulled into these products together with the paper as the products had a strong pulling force.

Paper shredders have an extremely strong cutting force, particularly cross cut paper shredders as

they have cutters installed in both a vertical and horizontal direction. In the above product test, the cross cut paper shredders were easily able to crush not only the rubber imitation fingers but also a wooden round bar which had a diameter of 5mm. It was accordingly found that paper shredders had a risk of causing severe accidents if fingers were pulled in.

Meanwhile, the following characteristics were discovered in the safety features of the test products:

- While the power was on, most products automatically started shredding when paper was placed into the shredder opening. It is a concern, however, that an emergency shut-down switch or other similar feature that forced the shredding operation to stop were not equipped with these products.
- Only 2 brands were found to provide the safety features to prevent children controlling the power switch easily.
- 2 other brands installed a lid over the shredder opening to enhance the safety of their products.
- Although a product of 1 brand was equipped with an automatic shut-down feature which was meant to stop the shredding operation when a hand or fingers touched the edge of the shredder opening, this could not be relied upon to work all the time.
- 15 brands had a written warning on the body of their products stating that infants must not use their products and 10 out of these 15 brands included drawings as well as the written warning. 1 brand did not have any warning label.
- Warning labels varied in each brand and there was no uniformed design found amongst them.
- All brands clearly demonstrated that “infants must not use the product” in their instruction manuals.

○ Examination of overseas publications

CPSC (Consumer Product Safety Commission) released “*An Evaluation of Finger Injuries Associated with Home Document (Paper) Shredder Machine*” in December 2004. This report points out the risk of fingers being pulled into a paper shredder opening and warns of possible danger. According to the report, a number of accident cases have been reported where children using a paper shredder did not release the paper at the shredder opening and his/her fingers were pulled into the shredder together with the paper. The report therefore suggests that what is mostly important in preventing accidents is that a shredder opening is designed to eliminate all possibilities of causing injuries.

○ Advice for consumers

Based on the above product test results and the report released by CPSC, NCAC has provided the following advice for consumers when using and purchasing a paper shredder product:

- Keep children away from the surrounding area where a paper shredder is placed and do not allow them to touch it.
- It is not enough only to turn off the paper shredder but the power plug must also be taken out from the socket.
- Put away or store the paper shredder out of the reach of children.
- Be alert that neckties and hair can be pulled into a paper shredder.
- Pay attention to the distance between the shredder opening and the cutting part of a paper shredder and choose a product that has fewer risks.
- Pay attention to safety features such as a power switch, a lid over the shredder opening and an auto shut-down device.

○ Requests to the industry

NCAC has made the following requests to the industry based on the above product tests results:

- Industry standards should be established that provide safety evaluation points and safety criteria.
- It is necessary to develop and generalize products that have a number of safety features such as a design whereby an infant’s fingers cannot enter into the shredder opening and an emergency shut-down mechanism.
- Precaution and/or warning labels with easy-to-understand designs and/or written statements should be uniformed within the industry and be displayed on products.

- Follow-up safety measures should also be put into action for the products that have already been sold.

○ Requests to the government

Based on the above product tests results, NCAC has made a request to the government to establish safety guidelines and criteria for paper shredder products in order to prevent accidents involving children.

A number of efforts have been made regarding the safety of paper shredder products including the development of measures and laws owing to the safety related problems that include accidents caused by paper shredders. NCAC has contributed to these efforts by establishing a mechanism that provides information collected through PIO-NET (Practical living Information Online NETwork) regarding death and serious accidents attributed to paper shredder products to the related government bodies in a prompt manner. Furthermore, the Consumer Products Safety Law was revised in November 2006 which imposes upon a trader to immediately report to the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry when their manufactured product causes an accident.

◇ *Activities of the NCAC*

—Product Testing—

How to use a car accessory jack in a safe way

A jack that comes with a car as an accessory plays an active role when a tire blows. Nevertheless, an accident taking place while using a jack may cause serious injuries and can also be life threatening. Under these circumstances, NCAC carried out the following activities involving jacks of various types of cars:

- A test regarding the strength of a jack, the characteristics of the car and the risks and usability of the jack in several assumed ways of use
- Providing information for consumers relating to the correct usage of a car accessory jack and also giving precautions when using a jack based on the above test
- Verifying the areas that need to be improved in the car body or the car accessory jack

The outline of the results of the above activities is described below:

○ Test results

- The connection points between the jacks and the car bodies had several different shapes and in some cases it was difficult to find the connection point visually due to a cover installed near the point.
- The disengagement of a jack while jacking up a car is highly likely to cause a serious accident.
- In the following situations, the load applied to some test jacks outweighed the maximum working load limit;
 - ☆ When jacking up a car while passengers and baggage were in the car
 - ☆ When jacking up a car to the maximum extending length of the jack
- As a result of a consumer monitor test, a great number of people were discovered not to be able to correctly identify the connection point between the jack and the car body.
- There were some risks such as the car falling off the jack when jacking up the car in an inappropriate place.
- All jack products had no problems regarding their strength.
- The finish quality in the area of some jacks where the hand makes contact was found to be poor.

○ Advice for consumers

- A jack must be placed correctly at the designated connection point.

- It is desirable to practice jacking up the car in advance.
- It is desirable to purchase a drag in advance.
- Be alert not to use a jack in an inappropriate place or where it is not suitable for using it.
- Never go under the car while jacking it up.

NCAC has made the following requests to the Japan Automobile Manufacturers Association based on the above test results:

- Safety measures should be provided for consumers in order that they will be able to jack up their cars in a more correct way.
- Safety measures should be provided for consumers to recognize the importance of a drag.
- Improvement measures should be provided for some jack products with a poor finish quality in the area where the hand makes contact and also those with a small maximum working load limit so as to ensure that the weight of the vehicle is safely matched.

Henna blended hair dye —dye effect and safety—

Henna blended products are varied in their types; a powder type that uses dried leaves of henna pulverized into powder and a cream type blended with henna extract or powder, and there are also shampoo products available. All of these products proclaim that the dye ingredients of henna become interconnected with the protein of hair and therefore grey hair can be dyed without being damaged. Some henna blended hair dye products offer several different colors and consumers are able to choose their desirable color.

NCAC-operated PIO-NET, however, has received inquiries and complaints from consumers regarding henna blended products. The details of these are mainly that “the hair did not become dyed at all”, “a concern about the safety of the product” and “scalp irritation”.

Given these circumstances, NCAC engaged in the following activities involving henna blended products that proclaimed to have a hair dye effect:

- An evaluation of the hair dye performance
- An examination of the dye content which is unique to henna and a verification analysis to see if any dyes that could cause allergies were contained in such products
- Safety analysis concerning possible scalp and skin irritation

The outline of the results of the above activities is described below:

○ Test results

- It was discovered that lawsone (dye ingredient of henna) was contained in some powder and cream type test products while there were others that barely contained lawsone.
- No dye effect could be expected from the products that did not contain lawsone.
- A number of products had a product label indicating that they used other dyes.
- After dyeing the hair as directed in the instruction manual, the dye performance was found to be poor. About half of the grey hair was dyed properly and that was only with 3 out of the 12 test product brands.
- Using powder type products repeatedly or extending the time period of leaving the hair after applying the products improved the dye performance. Nevertheless, it was discovered in a consumer monitor test that consumers “felt like actually using” 3 brands only.
- No brand was detected to contain those particular dyes that are most commonly used in permanent hair dye agents and are highly likely to cause allergies.
- No strong positive reaction was detected from people who used henna blended products and the number of people who showed a positive reaction was few. Accordingly, henna was found to be safer compared to dyes which are most commonly used in permanent hair dye agents. Nevertheless, people who have experienced scalp irritation when using permanent hair dye agents might be susceptible to the same problem and should be careful if using henna blended products.
- The test products that did not contain lawsone had a label that could possibly be interpreted to

suggest that grey hair could be dyed by “henna” and this may lead to consumer misunderstandings.

○ Advice for consumers

- Henna blended hair dye products in general were found to have a poor dye effect. It is desirable that consumers should understand this before using such products.
- The dye performance may improve with some products when using more effective dye methods.
- Carrying out a patch test is recommended for people who have experienced scalp irritation when using permanent hair dye agents.

NCAC has made requests to the industry and the government based on the above test results. The details of the requests are described below:

○ Requests to the industry

- Product labels of some test products from which lawsone was barely detected may lead consumers to the conclusion that grey hair can be dyed by henna and therefore should be improved.
- As the dye performance of the test products was generally poor, it is necessary to clearly indicate the true performance on products in order to avoid any misunderstandings. Tips to dye grey hair in a more effective way also need to be displayed on products.
- The necessity to carry out a patch test should be stated on products.

※These requests have been made to the Japan Cosmetic Industry Association and the Japan Hair Color Industry Association.

○ Requests to the government

- In the above test, lawsone was barely detected in some test products that proclaimed to contain henna and the dye performance of such products was poor. The industry thus should be instructed to improve the product labels of such products in order to avoid consumer misunderstandings.
- The industry should also be instructed to provide labels on products that highlight the necessity to carry out a patch test when using the products.

※These requests have been made to the Japan Fair Trade Commission and the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare.

How to use a bicycle pump in a safe way

The NCAC-operated Injury Information System has received injury information associated with bicycle pumps. According to these injury cases, consumers were injured while using a bicycle pump due to a component breaking or coming apart from the main body. These injuries mostly took place while using a pump with a quick motion (i.e. pushing down the pump handle) which caused severe injuries such as a broken bone. Particularly, the foot pumping type (pushing down the pump handle in a vertical direction), which is most commonly used, has been associated with a significant number of injury cases.

Under these circumstances, NCAC conducted a safety verification test of foot bicycle pump products, especially focusing on their strength, and provided information for consumers. The outline of these is described below:

○ Test results

- As a result of a consumer questionnaire, the frequency of bicycle pump usage was either once in a month or once in two to three months. A checkup before use was barely performed in most cases.
- The risk of sustaining injuries was verified by recreating accident circumstances using examples from the actual accident cases.
- After purchasing a pack of 15 pumps of 22 brands (total of 330 pumps), it was discovered that 13 brands (69 pumps) had some early defects.
- Hazardous defects were detected in 12 brands (56 pumps) when continuously using them without repairing their early defects. Furthermore, 8 brands (16 pumps) showed audible air leakages.
- The bond strength (not specified in the JIS) between the base and the piston rod of some pumps was

discovered to be relatively weak.

- While continuously using a pack of 4 pumps of all test brands, some defects occurred in 20 brands (54 out of the 88 pumps). Amongst these defects, 8 brands (15 pumps) had those that could not be repaired easily. The details of repairable defects were the loosening of the cap (15 brands/31 pumps) and the loosening of the pump handle (10 brands/15 pumps).
- Only 8 brands labeled the contact details (address or phone number) of their manufacturers and distributors on their product bodies.

○ Advice for consumers

- As a result of the above test, the incident rate of an early defect was discovered to be high. It is therefore necessary to determine if there is any loosening or cracks in each component of the product immediately after purchasing it. It is also essential to ensure that air can be pumped in normally.
- The loosening of the cap took place in some test products during the continuous usage test. It is thus vital to examine each component such as the pump handle, cap and cylinder body every time before using the pump to ensure that there is no loosening in order to prevent an accident.
- If pushing down the pump handle applies a significant load, do not forcefully pump in air so as to remove the risk of the accumulator tank coming apart and flying away from the main body.
- Store the pump as directed in the instruction manual. Avoid areas exposed to rain and direct sun light.

NCAC has made requests to the industry and the government based on the above test results. The details of the requests are described below:

○ Requests to the industry

- A thorough quality control is necessary as 13 out of the 22 test brands (69 out of the 330 pumps) had some early defects.
- The bond strength between the base and the piston rod should be adequate.
- Improvement measures should be taken in order that the cap does not become loosened while using a product.
- Products should be designed to have such a structure that prevents the accumulator tank coming apart and flying away from the main body.
- A product label indicating the necessity of a before-use checkup, suitable storage areas and contact details of the manufacturers and distributors should be placed on the main bodies of products.

※These requests have been made to the Bicycle Association (Japan), the Japan Chain Store Association and the Japan DIY Industry Association.

○ Requests to the government

- The industry should be instructed to indicate the necessity of a thorough quality control and quality improvement in order to prevent accidents.
- The JIS should be revised by taking into account the above test results as well as the state of the current distributed products.

※These requests have been made to the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry.

—Surveys and Studies—

Consumer problems regarding dry cleaning services

Although dry cleaning services are quite familiar for most of us, there are a great number of consumer problems relating to them.

The number of consumer counseling cases registered in PIO-NET involving clothing dry cleaning services was approximately 10,000 in the Fiscal 2000 to 2002 and about 9,000 from the Fiscal 2003 onward.

In response to the significant number of complaints regarding dry cleaning services, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare revised the Cleaning Business Law which it has jurisdiction over and enacted the revised law from October 1 2004.

The considerable number of consumer counseling case takes place particularly in May, June and November every year. The top five complaints are; 1) "loss of the clothing", 2) "stains made on the clothing", 3) "discoloration of the clothing", 4) "stretching or shrinkage of the clothing" and 5) "change in texture of the clothing." This order of complaints remains the same every year. NCAC engaged in the following activities regarding dry cleaning services that are familiar to the public:

- 1) A consumer questionnaire
- 2) A test to investigate causes of problems such as discoloration of clothing

The outline of the results of these is described below:

- Results of the consumer questionnaire (conducted in February 2006)
 - The respondents used dry cleaning services for their clothing with high expectations of the cleaning techniques provided in these services.
 - Nearly 70% of the respondents chose a particular dry cleaner as "it was in the neighborhood".
 - Over half of the respondents said that their dry cleaners "had a notice on their shop front indicating the contact details (name, address and phone number) of the actual dry cleaning site for customers to make any complaints to".
 - Over 70% of the respondents said that their cleaners "never failed" to hand them a piece of paper indicating "the contact details (name, address and phone number) of the actual dry cleaning site for customers to make any complaints to" when they received their clothing.
 - Dry cleaning methods were explained to customers "occasionally" or "depending on the circumstances."
- Test results
 - In the dry cleaning process, two cases were discovered regarding stains: 1) stains occurred immediately after hair perm liquid came into contact with the clothing; and 2) stains did not occur if only the perm liquid came into contact with the clothing.
 - There were some cases where stains caused by the perm liquid became visible in the finish heating process which took place after the dry cleaning process.
 - In response to a consumer's complaint regarding the patterns of T-shirts becoming blurred (= "bleeding") after using dry cleaning services, a test for this problem was performed and the bleeding problem was verified in the test.

NCAC has provided advice for consumers and made requests to traders as below based on the above described results:

- Advice for consumers
 - Both dry cleaners and consumers should examine the clothing.
 - Once receiving the clothing from the cleaner, put it away only after inspecting the finished quality.
 - Contact the cleaner as promptly as you can if any problem occurs.
- Requests to traders
 - Examine the clothing item(s), check the number of clothing items and provide a thorough control over the clothing item(s).
 - Comply with the Cleaning Business Law.
 - Share information regarding the handling methods of textile products and improve the drawings described in the care labels.
- ※ These requests have been made to the All Japan Laundry & Drycleaning Association, the Laundry and Drycleaning Society of Japan, the Japan Apparel Industry Council, the Japan Women's and Children's Wear Manufacturer's Association and the Council for Textile Product, Laundry and Drycleaning of Japan.

Consumer problems concerning unauthorized use of credit cards

The methods of unauthorized use of credit cards have become more malicious and better skilled. In particular, unauthorized use of counterfeit cards – created by “skimming” techniques designed to steal the magnetic data of a credit card using a magnetic information reader (“skimmer”) – is extremely malicious as consumers still have their cards with them and therefore tend to be unaware of the damages.

The number of consumer counseling cases registered in PIO-NET relating to unauthorized use of credit cards reached approximately 1,400 in the Fiscal 2005. Consumer counseling cases regarding problems that were possibly caused by skimming have also been received.

“The Depositor Protection Law (laws regarding a depositor’s protection from unauthorized mechanical withdrawal using counterfeit and stolen cards)” has been established in order to provide a mechanism to protect victims suffering bank card skimming related damages. On the other hand, there are no specific rules to compensate damages suffered from credit card skimming and it is therefore difficult to solve the problem.

Given these circumstances, NCAC listed the problematic areas of skimming related consumer problems as below:

- There are cases where credit card companies bill customers without presenting facts or source materials that prove a legitimate billing or do not provide the results of an investigation or investigation progress report for customers.
- It is often the case that membership clauses fail to clearly specify where the responsibility lies concerning unauthorized use of a counterfeit card created by skimming and other similar techniques.
- It is not made clear whether a credit card company or a customer holds the burden of proof if the customer suffers damages caused by a counterfeit card.

NCAC has provided advice for consumers based on the above findings:

- Take good care of your credit cards and bills.
- Never lend your credit card to any third party.
- Inspect a bill immediately after receiving it and contact your credit card company if you have anything unclear in it.
- Contact your local consumer center when you notice any problems.

Furthermore, NCAC has made requests to trade associations to provide instructions concerning the following points to credit card companies:

- Consider defining rules in membership clauses concerning unauthorized use of a counterfeit card created by skimming and other similar techniques in compliance with the Depositor Protection Law.
 - When a customer raises a question regarding a bill, conduct a thorough investigation immediately and respond to the inquiry in good faith.
 - Retain the transparency of the investigation and explain progress to the customer.
 - Be sure to provide the instructions to affiliated stores as well.
 - Take measures in order to secure safety in credit card trading.
- ※ These requests have been made to the Japan Consumer Credit Industry Association, the Japan Federation of Consumer Credit Companies and the Japan Credit Card Association.

The National Consumer Affairs Center of Japan is an independent administrative agency for consumer protection affiliated to the Cabinet Office. The main activities are consumer education, consumer consultation, research and product testing.

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