



# NCAC NEWS

*From  
National Consumer Affairs Center of Japan*

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\* For further details regarding each topic introduced below, refer to the following URL which contains the actual text of the reports released (PDF files) (Japanese only):<http://www.kokusen.go.jp/news/news.html>

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\* Major abbreviated names: ADR: Alternative Dispute Resolution  
NCAC: National Consumer Affairs Center of Japan  
PIO-NET: Practical Living Information Online Network System

# I. Injury/fatal accident

## 1. Using Slicers Safely: A Focus on the Usability of Safety Holders

### Product Testing Background

Slicers are cooking equipment used to slice vegetables. NCAC previously reported information on the risk of finger injury when using slicers in “The safety of cookware [Part 2]: 'Slicers' (published August 6, 2009)<sup>1</sup>”. Since that report, however, slicer-related injury accidents have continued to occur, including 21 cases of injury reported to PIO-NET (received since August 2009 and recorded through December 2012) and 43 cases of injury reported since December 2010 to the Medical Institution Network (data received from December 2010 - December 2012).<sup>2</sup>

Because finger tips get sliced off as a result of slicer injuries, this kind of injury is more serious and harder to recover from than knife-cut injuries. At the time same, the use of safety holders is considered an effective means of preventing such injuries.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, cases are seen in which safety holders are not included with the product (“To protect my fingers, I intended to buy a safety guard or vegetable holder together with the slicer, but I couldn't find such a product”) or in which safety holders are not used because they do not work well (“The slicer included a safety holder to use when the vegetable got small but not when it was still half-size, which is why I wasn't using it”).

Consequently, we conducted slicer tests with a focus on the usability of safety holders.

(Note 1) See NCAC News, Vol. 21, No. 4, 5p

[http://www.kokusen.go.jp/e-hello/data/ncac\\_news21\\_4.pdf](http://www.kokusen.go.jp/e-hello/data/ncac_news21_4.pdf)

(Note 2) The Medical Facilities Network is an initiative that aims to raise awareness through the use of information gathered from patients who have used medical facilities following accidents that caused life-threatening and/or bodily injury as a result of consumer activities. It is a joint project with the Consumer Agency and it has been gathering information since December, 2010.

(Note 3) A safety holder is a device that holds a vegetable in place when slicing in order to prevent finger injuries. It is also sometimes called a “finger guard” or “vegetable holder.”

Photo: Brands subjected to testing



### Example Cases of Inquiries & Complaints

**Case 1:** While slicing a carrot I shaved the pads of my thumb and middle fingers. Doctors told me it would take one month to fully recover. The slicer included a safety guard to use when the vegetable got small but not when it was still half-size, which is why I wasn't using it. (Inquiry from a woman in her 30s)

**Case 2:** The potato slipped from the safety holder and I cut the palm of my hand. The grip of the safety holder was bigger than I expected. With small hands like mine, the vegetable tends to slip and cause an injury.

(Inquiry from a woman in her 30s)

**Case 3:** I was using a slicer to make cucumber rings. The slicer's safety holder doesn't work with long, tall items, so I was doing the cutting without the safety holder. When the cucumber got down to about 2cm, I cut the index finger on my right hand, which was holding the cucumber.

(Inquiry from a man in his 50s)

## **Test Results**

### **(1) Safety Holder Types**

A variety of safety holders were used in addition to the standard flat type that uses numerous spikes to hold a vegetable, including those in which the small remains of a vegetable can be held by putting them into an opening at the center of the holder, those in which a skewer inside the safety holder is put through a vegetable in order to hold it in place, and those in which part of the safety holder slides shut around the vegetable like a clamp.

### **(2) Safety Holder Usability**

Nearly all brands recommend using a safety holder once vegetables get small, but there were some safety holders that could not securely hold small vegetables. No brand made it possible to securely slice an entire vegetable from start to finish.

There was also a risk of injury when safety holders were used improperly by holding the outside edges.

### **(3) Safety Holder Instructions**

The operating instructions for nearly all brands instructed users to use the safety holder when vegetables became small, but only one brand included such a label on the device itself.

### **(4) Risks from Plate Flexibility**

In the case of a brand with a V-shaped blade, which makes it possible to adjust the thickness of a cut, the plate was so flexible that it posed a risk because it could slice a vegetable to small size so quickly that the fingers holding it came too close to the blade.

## **Advice for Consumers**

- ① When purchasing a slicer, choose one that includes a safety holder and always keep in mind that a slicer is a bladed instrument.
- ② At present, it is difficult to slice an entire vegetable with a single safety holder. Still, when the vegetable gets small, always use a safety holder in order to prevent injury.

## **2. Children Burned by Detached Spigots on Hot-Water Dispensers**

### **Overview of Inquiries**

Loose spigots on in-home hot-water dispensers have been causing hot-water burns in small children. When handled by small children, the loose spigots can come off, causing hot water to gush from the dispenser. In 2012, accidents involving water dispensers of a particular kind were repeatedly reported to PIO-NET.



### **Example Cases of Inquiries & Complaints**

**Case 1:** Immediately after a serviceman had installed a water dispenser and left, the dispenser's hot-water spigot came off, causing burns to a one-year old child sprayed with hot water.

(Date accident occurred: June 2012, Chiba Prefecture, one-year old boy)

**Case 2:** A one-year old son suffered burns when he was sprayed with hot water from a dispenser. The spigot was locked but came off at the base. It was diagnosed as a second-degree burn by a physician who said the boy would need out-patient care for two weeks. (Date accident occurred: July 2012, Fukuoka Prefecture, one-year old boy)

**Case 3:** When the spigot on a water dispenser came off and large quantities of hot water sprayed out, a nearby infant was badly burned on the arm. (Date accident occurred: November 2012, Miyazaki Prefecture, infant girl)

### **Advice for Consumers**

If you are using a water dispenser with an affected model number installed in a home with infants, toddlers, or other small children or in an environment accessible to a large number of non-specific users, then you should contact the contracting business to have a "spigot turn-prevention belt" or "spigot turn-prevention ring" installed. Regardless of whether or not the dispenser is accessible to small children or many non-specific users, you should also contact the contracting business immediately if the spigot appears loose.

### **3. Warning When Using IH Cooktop Protective Mats**

#### **Product Testing Background**

Protective mats for IH (induction heating) cooktops are products that are placed on the cooktop to protect it against dirt, burnt food, etc.

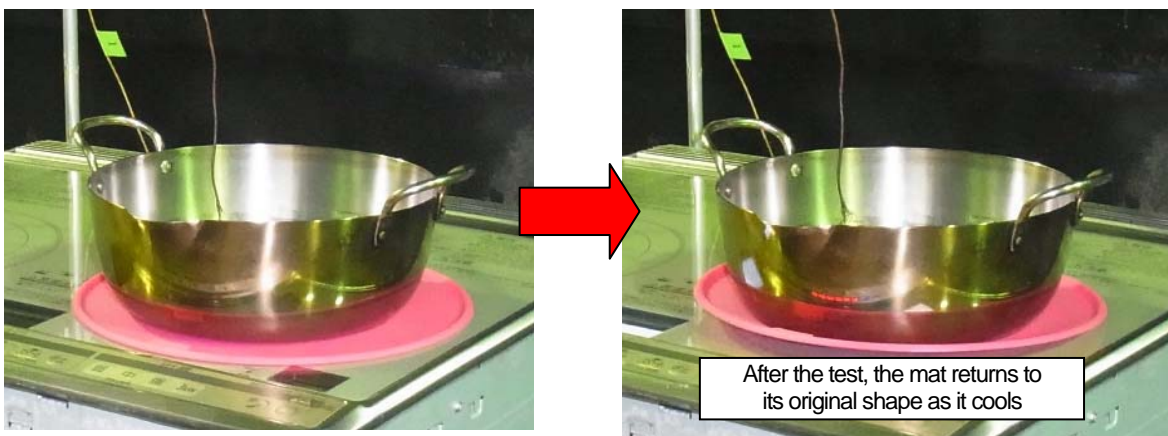
In July 2012, an accident was reported to PIO-NET in which oil in a tempura frying pan spontaneously combusted and caused a fire in an ordinary home in Shiga Prefecture.<sup>1</sup> A protective mat had been placed under the standard pan included with the IH cooktop and the pan was left unattended while the oil was heating. An additional three such cases were also reported to the Accident Information Data Bank (data registered between September 2009 and January 2013).<sup>2</sup> When oil spontaneously combusts in this way, the flames can spread and result in a serious accident, such as a fire.

Consequently, we tested protective mats by heating oil in a tempura frying pan on an IH cooktop to study the conditions under which their use might result in fire.

(Note 1) Spontaneous combustion is a phenomenon in which rising temperature causes an entity to ignite, even when there are no nearby flames. When something catches fire as a result of nearby flames it is said to have been "lit on fire."

(Note 2) The Accident Information Data Bank is a database system that first began service in September 2009. It provides centralized information on accidental injuries and deaths that happen in consumers' daily lives based on information it collects from relevant agencies. The Data Bank is operated jointly by the Consumer Affairs Agency and the National Consumer Affairs Center of Japan (NCAC) with support from related agencies as part of an effort to create an environment that prevents accidents from recurring and/or spreading.

Photo: Protective mat curls during heating



#### **Test Results**

Four kinds of protective mats from a total of nine brands were tested, including those made primarily of silicon, of glass fiber, of mica, and of crystallized glass.

##### **(1) Oil-heating test**

When oil was heated without a protective mat on the cooktop, the sensors functioned in any mode to control temperature and prevented the oil from catching fire.

When protective mats from brands utilizing mica were used on the cooktop, oil caught fire when heated without using the "deep-fry" feature.

##### **(2) Instructions in the operating instructions**

All brands included instructions for cooking with oil when making tempura, deep frying, etc.

### (3) Survey

A survey of major Japanese domestic IH cooktop manufacturers indicated that problems arise from the use of protective mats when cooking.

< Reference: video >

High-resolution video

[http://www.kokusen.go.jp/douga/20130221\\_1\\_news/n-20130221\\_1\\_high.html](http://www.kokusen.go.jp/douga/20130221_1_news/n-20130221_1_high.html)

Low-resolution video

[http://www.kokusen.go.jp/douga/20130221\\_1\\_news/n-20130221\\_1\\_low.html](http://www.kokusen.go.jp/douga/20130221_1_news/n-20130221_1_low.html)

#### **Advice for Consumers**

- ① Be aware that the use of protective mats can impede proper functioning of temperature sensors on IH cooktops.
- ② When heating oil on a cooktop with a protective mat, never leave the cooktop unattended while cooking as the oil may catch fire.

## **4. Easy Personal Importation and Use of Oral Abortion Drugs is Dangerous!**

#### **Overview of Inquiries**

PIO-NET has received numerous inquiries regarding oral abortion drugs (e.g. Mifepristone, RU486) not approved for use in Japan purchased from internet shopping sites.

Because of the risk of vaginal bleeding, serious infectious disease, and other health hazards posed by oral abortion drugs, the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare issued a reminder calling attention to the restrictions on personal imports by which imports, regardless of quantity, are allowed only when the required procedures have been followed in accordance with a prescription or instruction from a physician. Moreover, the act of causing an abortion, if performed by anyone other than a certified physician (including a pregnant woman), may result in criminal prosecution for causing an abortion.

Because the purchase and use of oral abortion drugs without consulting a medical facility not only risks breaking the law but also poses a significant health hazard, the Ministry decided to call consumer attention to the matter in order to prevent injury before it happens.

#### **Example Cases of Inquiries & Complaints**

**Case: I purchased oral abortion drugs when I viewed a mobile site claiming that an abortion could be performed safely.**

The Japanese-language page of the foreign mobile internet site wrote that an abortion could be performed without surgery. It said that an abortion could be safely performed just like a natural miscarriage if the drugs were taken for three days within 49 days of pregnancy. I ordered and wired funds for the abortion drug package, which included post-abortion antibiotics and anti-hemorrhaging medication. I want to cancel the purchase because I have seen internet posts about the risks.

#### **Advice for Consumers**

Oral abortion drugs such as Mifeprex, Mifegyne, Xiyin, and Apano (medical name Mifepristone) must never be purchased and used through personal import.

## **5. Beware Accidents Involving Tooth Brushes for Infants and Toddlers!**

### **Overview of Inquiries**

Brushing teeth is an important daily habit for preventing cavities. Because brushing teeth has become an established habit, the number of small children with cavities has been declining year after year. To help infant and toddler children grow accustomed to brushing teeth from an early age, some caregivers now used specialized tooth brushes to brush their children's teeth. Various types of such tooth brushes for infants and toddlers are available on the market. At the same time, the Medical Facilities Network has received information on accidents in which infants and toddlers have fallen with a tooth brush in their mouths and jabbed the inside of their mouths while brushing. There have even been reports of cases in which the tooth brush pierced the cheek, thus requiring surgery and hospitalization. At the same time, a survey finds that only 30% of caregivers have heard news of such accidents.

Photo: Infant and toddler toothbrushes of various kinds (some photographs have been edited)



### **Example Cases of Inquiries & Complaints**

#### **Case: Walking and falling down while brushing**

When brushing his teeth while walking indoors, he fell forward in a tatami-floored room. The toothbrush was laying on the tatami mat. Upon inspection, the brush was covered entirely in blood. He couldn't drink water. His upper right pharynx had been lacerated. (Date accident occurred: February 2012, two-year old boy, moderate injury)

### **Advice for Consumers**

- ① During brushing, caregivers should be careful to remain beside the child
- ② Do not allow children to walk around with a toothbrush in their hand or mouth
- ③ Children might also bump into people or objects and hurt themselves, so pay careful attention to their surroundings as well
- ④ Also avoid brushing while standing on unstable surfaces, such as a chair or stepping stool, as falling can lead to injury

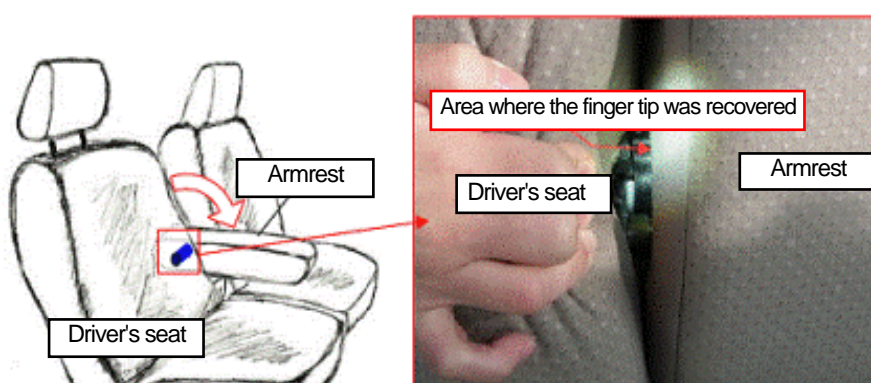
## 6. Toddler's Middle Finger is Severely Injured When Squeezed by Armrest Mount in Consumer Automobile

### Case Overview

A family was parked in a convenience store parking lot, eating lunch in the car, the father in the driver's seat, the mother in the front passenger seat, and a toddler in the rear (left) seat. At the time, the movable armrest on the driver's seat was in the up position. After eating, the toddler moved to the center of the rear seat, placing his right hand on the driver's seat-back and his left hand on the front passenger seat-back as he peaked through at his parents. As he did so, his right hand slipped, causing his upper body to come down on the raised armrest. As the armrest fell forward, the child's middle finger slipped in between the driver's seat-back and armrest where it was squeezed by the armrest's rotating mount, severing the upper one-third of the child's middle finger, from the tip to the first joint.

(Date accident occurred: February 2013, five-year old boy)

Photo: Movable driver's seat armrest



### Advice for Consumers

- ① There are many areas inside consumer automobiles that have moving parts made of hard materials in places we cannot see.
- ② A toddler's finger was severely injured when it slipped into one such space. The occurrence of such an accident should remind caregivers to be very careful when operating armrests and such, to ensure that hands and legs do not get caught.

## II. Property damage

### 1. Home Renovation Troubles on the Rise:

#### - Unscrupulous Door-to-door Renovation Sales Are Not the Only Trouble -

### Overview of Inquiries

The number of inquiries & complaints related to home renovation has been on the rise since 2008. In fact, many of the unscrupulous door-to-door sales troubles that have targeted senior citizens and become a concern in recent years are said to involve home renovation. In July 2005 and October 2010, NCAC issued reminders calling attention to the troubles related to door-to-door home renovation sales (see "References"). Still, the number of inquiries & complaints has continued to rise as before, compounded by disaster-related troubles in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake.

On the other hand, the content of the inquiries reveal slightly different trends from the past. Whereas inquiries related



to estimates and contracts are on the rise, inquiries related to excessive contract prices are on the decline.

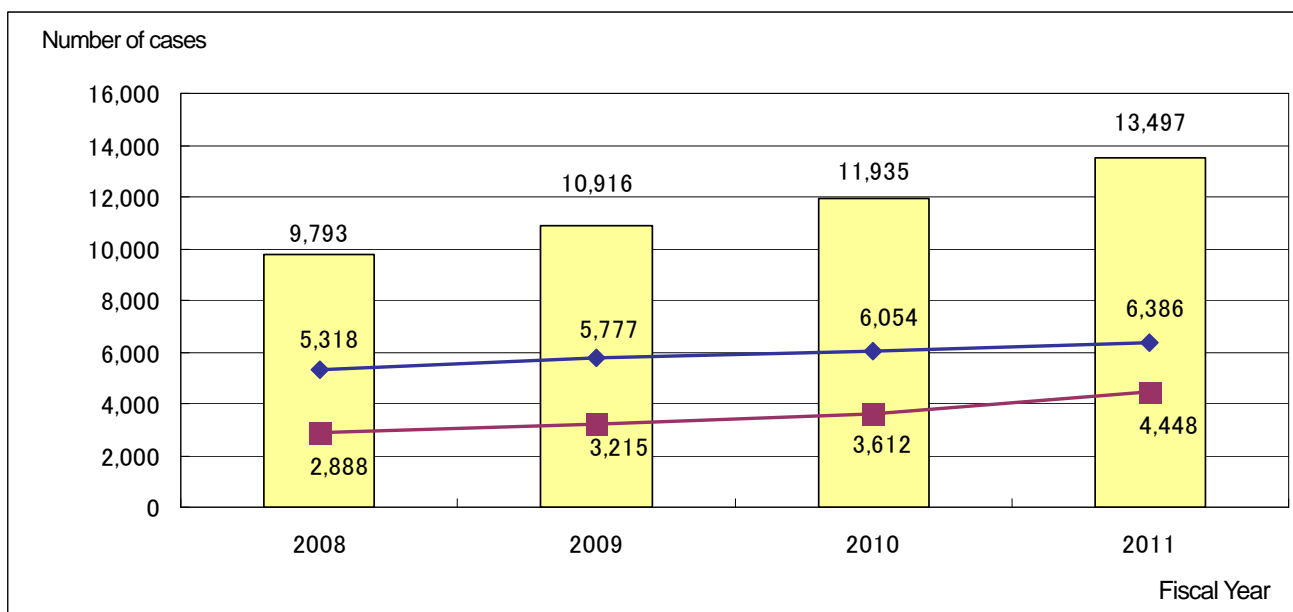
< References >

"Consumer Troubles Related to Door-to-Door Renovation Sales: Serious Troubles Caused by Unscrupulous Businesses Continue" (Published July 20, 2012)

"Recurring trouble in connection to door-to-door sales for home renovation: Prevent further expansion by watching over the elderly with dementia" (Published October 21, 2010)

[http://www.kokusen.go.jp/e-hello/data/ncac\\_news22\\_5.pdf](http://www.kokusen.go.jp/e-hello/data/ncac_news22_5.pdf)

<Graph 1> Number of home renovation inquiries & complaints  
 ■ Yearly Inquiries ◆ Door-to-Door Sales ■ In-Store Shopping



**Example Cases of Inquiries & Complaints**

**Case 1 (Case of door-to-door sales): I signed a contract to have my roof painted, but the amount on the contract was altered using correction fluid**

I was visited in the evening by a contractor who claimed to have construction experience on public facilities in the neighborhood. Without my consent, he used his ladder to inspect my roof and told me that there were problems with the tiles that required immediate work. Feeling pressured to sign, I ended up signing a contract. It was a long while before the contractor sent me my copy of the contract. When I finally received it, I found that the price on the contract had been changed with correction fluid. (Inquiry from a woman of unknown age)

**Case 2 (Case of in-store purchase): I agreed to have renovation work done but the final invoice is 1.5 times more than the original amount**

I asked a friend's contractor, whom I had used previously, to renovate the living room of my home. Before agreeing to have him do the work and again afterward, I told him that I wanted a written agreement but never received one. We discussed it orally and the amount for the work was supposed to be 1,000,000 yen. When the work was finished, however, I was invoiced for 1,500,000. I'm dissatisfied with the construction work on the built-in furniture but was told by the contractor that it was the best he could do because that portion of the construction is not his specialty. I cannot accept that. (Inquiry from a woman in her 50s)

### **Advice for Consumers**

- ① Get multiple quotes and verify both the price and work to be done
- ② Make a record of any discussions you have with contractors regarding the work to be done
- ③ When requesting work to be done, carefully consider whether the work is necessary
- ④ Do not make on-the-spot agreements during forms of solicitation, such as door-to-door sales, that are likely to catch you off-guard
- ⑤ Make use of programs designed to prevent such troubles (e.g. estimate checking services, insurance policies, etc.)
- ⑥ When you encounter trouble, contact your local consumer center or other such agency immediately

## **2. Do not send money through parcel delivery services!**

### **- Beware Schemes that Get You to Send Money by Disguising it as Other Goods -**

#### **Overview of Inquiries**

Consumer affairs centers nationwide have received numerous inquiries and complaints regarding "pressure sales fraud." Most recently, schemes that get consumers to send money through parcel delivery services (takuhaibin) rather than bank transfers have become prevalent. It is virtually impossible to recover such money once it has been sent, so never send such money.

#### **Example Cases of Inquiries & Complaints**

**Case: As instructed, I sent 10,000,000 yen through a parcel delivery service by labeling it "clothes."**

One day I got a phone call from Company B asking if I had received a pamphlet from Company A. When I answered that I had received it, the person on the phone said that he wanted to purchase bonds from Company A. Company B would pay the cost, so he wanted me to request the bonds from Company A for him. So I sent the request form to Company A by fax.

The next day I got a call from Company A. "We received a payment transfer from B but the payment is not from your place of residence. The Financial Services Agency has called attention to this and frozen the account. The problem is that you let someone use your name. As things stand, you will end up in jail. Please send 10,000,000 yen in cash immediately." As instructed, I sent the money to the designated address through a parcel delivery service by labeling the product "clothes" and placing a towel over the money. As time passed I started to get worried and consulted with my family who told me that I had probably been swindled. I want to get my money back.

(Inquiry from a woman in her 70s)

#### **Advice for Consumers**

- ① Never accept the word of someone who instructs you to send money through a parcel delivery service.
- ② Be skeptical of any scheme that promises to "recover damages"
- ③ Local consumer centers and other such agencies will never contact anyone other than a person who has submitted an inquiry or complaint.

## **3. Make Good Money!? At-Home Work Writing Online Advertising**

### **- Lured by Informational Products that "Teach Methods for Making Good Money" -**

#### **Overview of Inquiries**

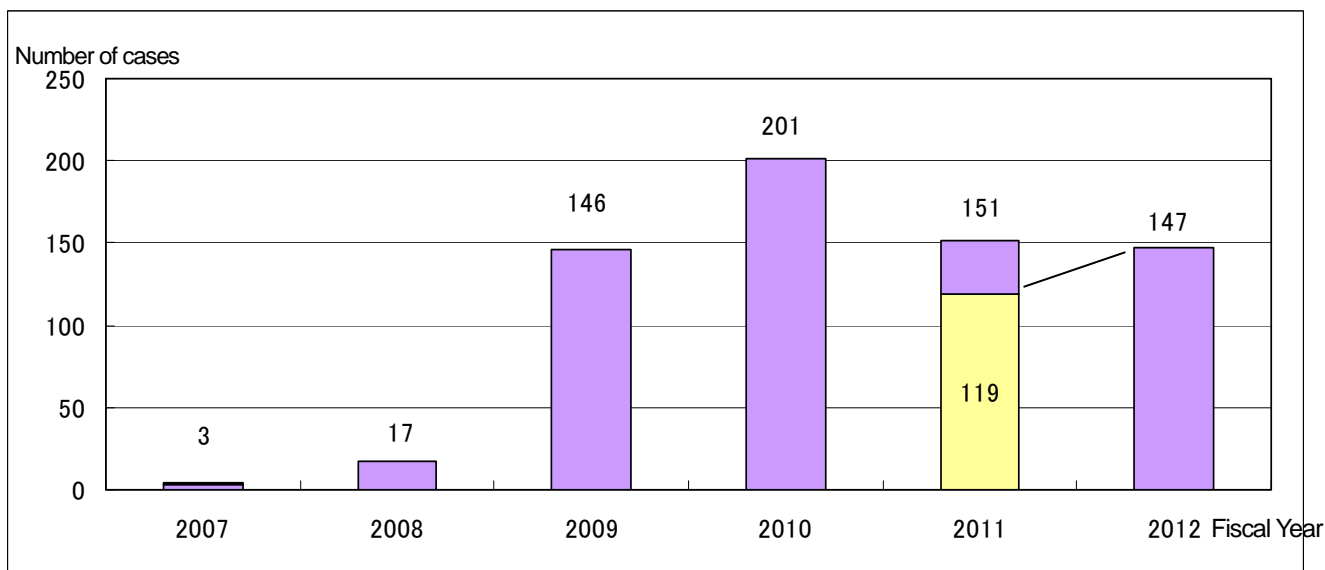
There is again a growing number of inquiries & complaints regarding at-home work writing online recommendations and other forms of advertising ("at-home online ad-writing") based on the purchase of informational products.

These include schemes that are directed at consumers who casually purchase informational products on the

promise of "easy work that makes good money" and then, for instance, pressure them over the phone to enter an agreement for at-home online ad-writing or get them to purchase expensive at-home online ad-writing informational products. Contrary to what they are told before agreeing to the contract, consumers rarely gain any income under this unscrupulous at-home business scheme.

When consumers seek to terminate the contract, the business operators will often not return a consumers' money; moreover, as these schemes have grown more sophisticated, business operators in some cases have denied that Telemarketing Sales and/or Business Opportunity Sales under the Act on Specified Commercial Transactions even apply.

< Graph 2 > Number of inquiries & complaints regarding at-home online ad-writing based on the purchase of informational products



Note: Inquiries and complaints for informational learning materials from among drop-shipping and affiliate marketing inquiries and complaints

(data registered through February 28, 2013)

### **Example Cases of Inquiries & Complaints**

**Case: I didn't know the content of the work before agreeing, but was convinced over the phone that I would "make good money" and agreed, yet I haven't made any money**

When I did a search on the internet for "at-home work," a blog said "Earn 400,000 yen per month as a side job!" When I entered my contact information to learn more, I received an email telling me to buy a 20,000-yen informational product that included secrets to success. I contacted them to ask what kind of informational product it was. I was told that they couldn't share any detailed information but that I would certainly "make good money." He was convincing, so I believed him and bought the product. Although there wasn't any detailed explanation of the side-job in the informational product, it said in writing that my money would be returned if I didn't earn anything, so I expected that the side-job would make me good money. Afterwards, when I contacted the business operator to ask about the content of the work, I got a phone call telling me that I should just follow their directions and everything would be fine. "We'd like you to agree to buy 150 units of anti-smoking goods for 300,000 yen. They'll sell immediately. Have confidence because we'll give you our full support to sell them." He spoke with such conviction that I believed him and agreed. After making the payment, I received an email informing me that the content of the work was writing advertisements on a blog. As instructed, I made updates to the blog and logged hundreds of visits and comments on other blogs to attract visitors to mine, yet there wasn't any revenue. If I had been informed about the content of the work and the system for making money before agreeing, I would not have entered into the agreement. I want to get my money back.

(Inquiry from a woman in her 40s)

### Advice for Consumers

- ① Do not easily trust advertisements and thus request materials or purchase informational products
- ② Do not trust advertisements or sales pitches that promise you will certainly "make good money"
- ③ Do not enter into costly agreements or agreements that are not clear about the content of the work
- ④ Be aware of the entrepreneurial nature of your work
- ⑤ In the case of trouble, consult your local consumer center or other such agency immediately.

## 4. Fictitious Billing Troubles on the Rise Again! - Billing Method Shifts from Postcards to Email -

### Overview of Inquiries

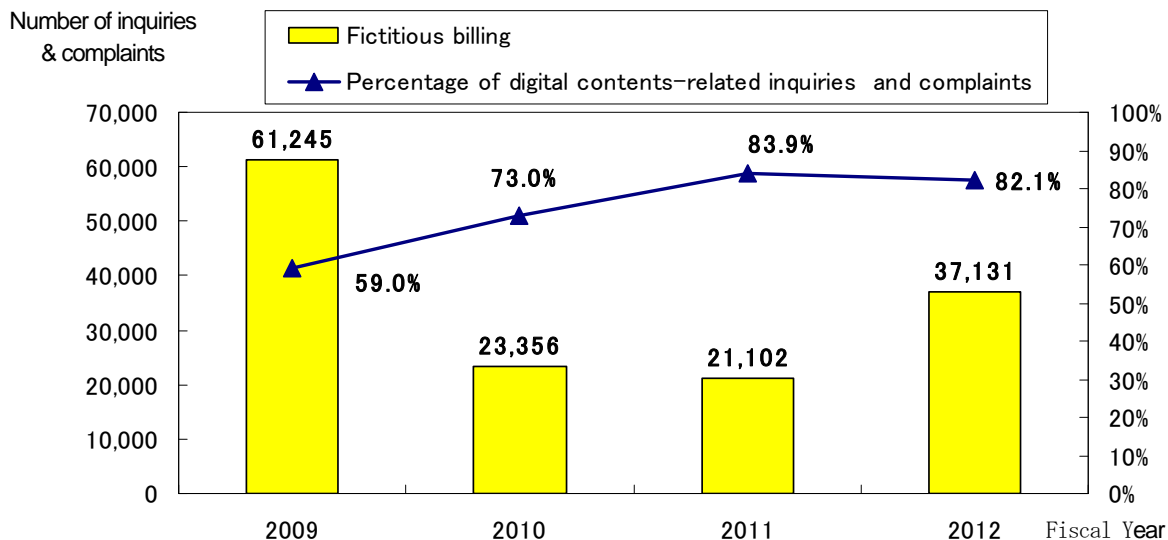
Troubles from fictitious billing, in which consumers are billed for unknown charges, reached roughly 680,000 incidents at their peak in 2004, at which time fictitious billing troubles were a full 35% of all consumer inquiries and complaints.

Since then, the number of such inquiries and complaints has steadily declined, in part thanks to public and private efforts to eradicate such troubles by calling attention to them. In 2012, however, such inquiries began to rise again (See Graph 3).

The billing method has shifted from postcards to email, with charges often billed for digital contents under categories such as "usage fee for general information site," "usage fee for mobile contents," and "usage fee for paid site."

Once a consumer makes contact with the business or pays the charges, the business intensifies its billing further. In at least one case, such payments exceeded 1,000,000 yen.

< Graph 3 > Number of inquiries & complaints related to fictitious billing



(data registered through March 21, 2013)

### Example Cases of Inquiries & Complaints

**Case: I received an unknown "final notice" email demanding that I contact the business by telephone**

On my mobile phone, I received a "final notice" email for "unpaid contents charges" that I didn't recognize. The message read, "The company that manages mobile digital content to which your mobile device was previously subscribed has asked us to conduct a background investigation. Because membership was not canceled during the

free trial period, we will begin a background investigation to digitally authenticate the sender's device and take legal action in accordance with the Electronic Consumer Contract Act, unless you take action." It continued, "If you desire detailed confirmation, settlement, and/or consultation to pursue a more amiable resolution before the background investigation begins and legal action is taken, please contact us no later than 12pm of the next business day." The message then provided a phone number. I have never received any prior bill. Should I contact them?

(Inquiry from a man in his 40s)

### **Case 2: After I called the business, I was billed again and again for charges and eventually paid**

I received an email on my mobile phone from an investigation firm. It read, "Your subscription, which you left without canceling, is now overdue. We have been asked to conduct a background investigation. Please contact us by the end of today." I did once take a peak at an adult site on my mobile phone. Surprised, I called them and was told that I owed 202,000 yen, which I sent by courier mail as a "book." After that, I got a call saying I owed additional money on two separate sites, so I sent 491,000 yen as a "book" via parcel delivery. After that, I got a call from a man identifying himself as a lawyer who said that the matter had been transferred from the Summary Court to a Civil Court and that I should send another 680,000 yen. If I didn't, I was told that it would go to trial. What should I do now?

(Inquiry from a woman in her 50s)

### **Advice for Consumers**

- ① Do not contact the billing party
- ② If you have no recollection of using a service, ignore the bills without paying
- ③ Consult your local consumer center; in egregious cases, consult with the police

## **III. Other**

### **1. 40th Survey of Trends in People's Livelihood: Findings and Summary** **- The Internet in Daily Life -**

#### **Survey Overview**

The National Consumer Affairs Center of Japan (NCAC) conducted its 40th Survey of Trends in People's Livelihood during October and November 2012. Since 1971, the survey has continuously examined "product and service-related dissatisfaction and harm" while addressing topics related to areas of frequent inquiry and complaint from consumers and phenomena that have become issues of societal concern.

This year, under the title "The Internet in Daily Life," the survey examined thought and behavior in product and service-related purchases and transactions over the internet, as well as internet-related troubles and smartphone usage. Additionally, to see how consumer thought and behavior has changed since the Great East Japan Earthquake, it also surveyed shifts in thought and behavior in normal daily life through a comparison with last year's survey "Things We Do and Precautions We Take (Energy Conservation and Efficiency, Disaster Prevention, and Support to Disaster-affected Areas)."

#### **Survey Results**

##### **1. Categories over time: Product and Services-related Dissatisfaction/Harm**

- 1) During the past year, 35.4% of respondents reported dissatisfaction and/or harm from purchased products and services. This is an increase of two percentage points over the previous survey (33.1%).
- 2) 32.9% of respondents reported experiencing a sales pitch from unscrupulous businesses and/or those with troubling business practices. When inconvenienced or upset by such solicitations, 73.5% of respondents

reacted by "refusing them (including refusing to accept calls, email, or text messages)," while 45.1% "ignored them" (multiple answer format).

- 3) Awareness of the National Consumer Affairs Center of Japan (67.9%) was unchanged from the previous survey, while awareness of local consumer centers (73.6%) increased by three percentage points over the previous survey.
- 4) Awareness of consumer-related institutions and laws was 85.0% for "cooling off," 57.8% for the Act on the Protection of Personal Information, and 33.8% for the Product Liability Act, while roughly 10% for the Consumer Contract Act, Consumer Safety Act, and Consumer Basic Act.

## **2. The Internet in Daily Life**

- 1) During the past year, 75.9% of respondents used the internet for non-work.
  1. Among all internet users (excluding those who only use it for email), 79.3% had used the internet for purchases/transactions.
  2. Purchases and transactions included, for instance, "Purchases made on domestic Japanese sites" (65.8%), "Reservations for travel, accommodations, etc." (43.5%), and "Purchases of digital contents (music, books, newspapers, video, etc.)" (21.3%) (multiple answer format).
  3. When making a purchase or transaction, respondents paid attention to, for instance, "Purchasing from a reputable big-name business's site" (58.3%), "Verifying the integrity of the site and reliability of the business operator" (41.1%), and "Verifying whether returns, exchanges, and cancellations are honored" (40.5%) (multiple answer format).
- 2) Among all internet users (including those who only use it for email), 46.9% of respondents reported running into non-work trouble over the internet during the past year, while 48.8% reported "Did not run into trouble." Trouble included, for instance, "Receiving unsolicited bulk e-mail" (43.4%) and "Being billed for usage charges on unknown sites" (3.4%)(multiple answer format).
- 3) Smartphones were "used" by 31.3% of respondents, and "not used" by 67.5%.

## **3. Changes in Thought and Behavior Since the Great East Japan Earthquake**

- 1) One and a half years after the disaster, 89.4% of respondents reported having "things we do and precautions we take." That is a decline of five percentage points from the the previous survey (94.7%), taken during the second and third months following the disaster.  
Items included, for instance, "Energy conservation/energy efficiency" (72.0%) and "Preparation of disaster supplies and portable emergency supplies" (38.3%)(multiple answer format).
- 2) When asked about how their thought and behavior in ten categories of normal daily life had changed between the time before and after the disaster, there was a greater number of respondents who reported "started doing so since the disaster" than "have done so both before and after the disaster" when it came to taking an interest in "energy issues" and "the supply and fee structure of electricity and water" and to "acting with an awareness that their own actions as consumers can improve the future of society and the global environment."