

# Safety standards could reduce consumer injuries

By Lisa Brown and Ron Ruggless

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that if national safety standards were set for consumer products, 17 per cent of product-related injuries could be reduced, a commission spokesman said Monday night at a program sponsored by the University Extension Division.

Increased safety education may be the solution to reducing the other 83 per cent, Kathy Melcher, community services director at the Kansas City area office of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, told a group of about 35 people attending the two-night program.

A pilot study now is being conducted to see how important education is to increased safety awareness, she said.

In October, 1972, Congress passed the

Consumer Product Safety Act and in May, 1973, the Commission was formed.

"Our agency is unique because we perform an information and education function," she said.

Until now the agency's emphasis has been on increasing consumer awareness of product safety and on making the public aware of the functions of the commission to better use it. Through complaints, products may be investigated and, eventually, standards set, she said.

Melcher said there was no product safety legislation in any of the four states she services: Kansas, Nebraska, Missouri and Iowa. She said Nebraska is working on a bicycle safety act though, and added that "exciting things are happening" toward legislative action in Missouri.

The Commission cannot really take

complaints to court, she said, until it has established its own standards.

"We've been dragging our feet so long," she said, "and haven't been able to write the necessary standards."

The Commission now administers five Congressional Acts, including standards set by other agencies now under their jurisdiction.

Those acts include one establishing the Commission, Flammable Fabrics Act, Federal Hazardous Substances Act, Poison Prevention Packaging Act, and the Refrigerator Safety Act.

Melcher said the Commission's objective is to eliminate all unreasonable risks in consumer products. They have jurisdiction over more than 10,000 products defined as products used in and around the home or recreational area.

The difference between misuse and unreasonable risk may be determined by the product, user or environment and varies in different situations, she said.

Investigators study many accidents reported by hospitals by going to the home to observe the situation and talking with people about external factors which might have caused the accident, she said.

Progress has been made in many areas, but much still has to be done, Melcher said.

With the use of new safety caps on aspirin bottles, accidental aspirin ingestion by children was reduced 43 per cent.

Melcher alerted people to safety hazards often found in toys. She said that often, even if a safe toy is purchased, other factors including proper use, maintenance, storage and disposal of the toy may also present hazards.

She showed several public information films made for television, illustrating toy, home and poison hazards and suggested that community action groups work between the commission and local stations to have more of these films broadcast.

Community groups and individuals also can help with a consumer evaluation and check of Christmas decorations and lights, Melcher said Tuesday evening.

Outlining a program of consumer checks on retail outlets of Christmas lights, she said Christmas lights are a seasonal product used in a potentially dangerous environment, such as evergreen trees, around children and in closed, dry homes.

Among things the consumer "deputy" should look for in inspecting Christmas tree light sets are cracked or broken sockets that could lead to dangerous shocks,

especially in the installation or changing of the bulbs, Melcher said.

Loose add-on connectors and exposed electrical wires are also fire hazards and electrical dangers, she said, and should be checked by submitting the product to a quick, but thorough, manipulation of the wires, simulating actual use.

In addition, exposed bulb wires and socket contacts can be dangerous and should be checked during the consumer evaluation, she said.

The consumer deputy is not an employee of the consumer services, Melcher said, so they have no real authority to demand the retail manager to inspect the lights.

The deputy merely submits a report on the type, style brand and classification of the light, with a report on its possible hazards to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, she added.

## Student listed in good condition

A UNL freshman student was listed in good condition Tuesday night at Lincoln General Hospital after being admitted for observation early Monday morning, according to Lois Ullman, hospital supervisor.

Michael Jarvos, of McCook, suffered cuts on his arms and was taken by ambulance to the hospital about 7:30 a.m. Monday, said Ken Bader, vice chancellor for student affairs. He said there was no evidence of foul play by a second party in the incident.

Bader refused to release further details, pending an investigation.



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