



## CONSUMER UPDATE

### Awareness programmes on trans fats



On the occasion of children's day, CAG, in collaboration with Citizens' Voice Club (CVC), Coimbatore organised an awareness program on food safety and the ill effects of trans fats, at RK Rangammal Kalvi Nilayam HSS School, Coimbatore. Dr. K. Tamilselvan, Designated Officer and Dr. Devaprasath, Pediatric Cardiologist at Sri Ramakrishna Hospitals, Coimbatore, gave detailed information about trans fats, its ill effects, the need to consume healthy and safe food, and highlighted the measures taken in and around schools in Coimbatore district to promote healthy diets.

In another event organised at Kongu Engineering College, Erode, for students of the Food Technology Department, Mr. Balakrishnan, Food Safety Consultant at CAG, presented on food safety management systems, ill effects of trans fats, FSSAI's regulations on trans fats, etc., which were well received by the students.

### Awareness programmes on safe and sustainable household products

CAG is organising several awareness programmes among low income consumers in Model Lane, Royapuram, through dialogue cards, flip book, board games, puppet shows, street plays, quiz competitions, guest lectures, etc., to educate them on their rights and responsibilities as consumers and about use of safe and sustainable household products such as ISI marked gas hose pipes and LED lights. In this regard, CAG organised a demo meeting with speakers from Tamil Nadu Electricity Department and Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS). Mr. Balakrishnan from BIS explained the importance and need for standards, and the safety behind the use of ISI marked gas hose pipe. Mr. Jayachandran from the Electricity Department spoke about the advantages of LED bulbs over incandescent bulbs, the cost benefits and advised consumers to switch to using LED lights. Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) had put up a stall on CAG's request, and LED bulbs were sold at subsidised prices during the meeting.



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## **Awareness program on telecom services**

CAG, in collaboration with Tamil Nadu Progressive Consumer Centre, Pattabiram had organised an awareness program on telecom services at the Jaya College of Arts and Science, Thirunindravur, Thiruvallur District. There were around 100 participants which included students, faculty members, representatives from civil society organisations and telecom service providers like BSNL, Vodafone Idea, Airtel and Jio. Saroja from CAG presented about the various consumer friendly initiatives of the telecom regulator, which was followed by brief presentations by all service providers. Subsequently, there was an interactive session, where consumers posed several questions to the service providers. The principal of the college presided over the event.

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## **Promotional practices of pharmaceutical companies**

Recent [\*media reports\*](#) reveal that the Department of Pharmaceuticals has warned the pharma industry to step up their self regulation on promotional practices. This move by the Department comes in the wake of a study done by an NGO which revealed that bribes were omnipresent in the industry and the implementation of related regulatory codes lacked credibility. In addition to this, the Department received a complaint against a drug manufacturer for providing incentives in the form of sponsoring travel, food and stay for participation in conferences, which are strictly prohibited under the Uniform Code of Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices (UCPMP) and Indian Medical Council (Professional conduct, Etiquette and Ethics), Regulations 2002. The UCPMP is a voluntary code put out by the Department, to be adopted by the pharmaceutical companies.

As early as in 2008-2009, CAG had done an extensive study on the subject to get a sense of the promotional chain at various levels across the drugs and diagnostics sector. CAG interviewed doctors, consumers, laboratories, pharmacies, hospitals, and medical representatives and at the end of the study it was confirmed that the promotional practices adopted by the pharma companies and diagnostics had a substantial and, direct influence on the prescriptions written by doctors.

Following this, CAG drafted rules to prevent unethical practices in promotion of drugs by pharmaceutical companies, to be incorporated under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940. CAG handed over the document to senior officials in the pharmaceutical department and health ministry and, with support from the All India Drug Action Network (AIDAN) and other organisations working in the space, continued to push for the uptake of it.

Later, the Government drafted the Uniform Code of Pharmaceutical Marketing Practices (UCPMP), which was to be a statutory code under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955. Public comments were sought and finally, in December 2014, it was published as a voluntary code, to be complied with by the pharma companies. According to the code, no gifts or monetary benefits should be offered or promised and no travel facility or hospitality should be extended to doctors by pharma manufacturers/distributors/wholesalers/retailers. The preamble of the code clearly states that it is a voluntary code at present and its implementation will be reviewed after a period of six months from the date of its issue, and if it was found that the code was not being implemented effectively by the pharma companies, the Government would consider making it a statutory code.

However, the voluntary code continues to be in vogue till today and its effectiveness, or rather the lack of it is revealed by the recent study. Whether the government recognises the failure of the voluntary code and converts it into a statutory one that puts a stop to unethical promotional practices, remains to be seen.

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### **Consumers can now get food tested through consumer organisations : FSSAI**

In December 2019, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), in order to gain consumer trust, decided to get food testing done through various consumer organisations in the country. Accordingly, it has decided to authorize credible voluntary consumer organisations (VCOs) to assist consumers in getting such tests done. There will be a reimbursement of the fees even if the consumer sample failed. Over 80 VCOs decided to create a nation-wide network of consumer organisations for food safety and nutrition (NetCOFaN) with the support of FSSAI at a workshop in New Delhi. This network will initially work in three specific areas, namely – 1) awareness and training, 2) mobilisation of small and petty food businesses for various schemes, and 3) food testing and surveillance.

These VCOs would be provided token funding based on their activity to ensure sustainability and continuity. FSSAI CEO Pawan Agarwal also said that “the VCOs are key part of the system to build an atmosphere of trust, transparency and accountability in the area of food safety and nutrition.” He hoped that ‘VCOs will themselves take up this work with full responsibility and accountability and provide last mile connectivity to the consumers.’ *For more details, [click here](#)*

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### **SBI Card to levy a fee on all cheque payments from January, 2020**

SBI Card, a unit of SBI, has decided to impose a charge of Rs. 100 plus taxes (Rs. 118/- approx.) for all cheque payments. Many of its customers, especially senior citizens, prefer making payments through cheques for the reason that they consider it to be more secure, and those who are not comfortable with internet/ mobile banking will be much affected by this decision of SBI Card. What could be the motivation behind such actions that harass consumers?! *For more details, [click here](#)*

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### **FSSAI's Milk Survey**

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India did a milk survey across India to monitor the safety and quality of milk. The survey results revealed that 41% of the samples fell short of some of the safety parameters and 7% of the milk samples were found to be unsafe for human consumption. Of the 7%, a major finding was the presence of Aflatoxin M1 (a kind of fungus) residues beyond permissible limits (5.7%), which was reported from Delhi, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. The other was the presence of antibiotics (1.2%), which was found in samples taken from Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Overall, 93% of the samples were found to be safe for human consumption.

*Source: Economic Times*

## Online store ordered to pay compensation of Rs.8000/- for charging above MRP

Sandesh had paid Rs. 250/- and purchased an Eveready LED torch from Cloudbtail India, through the e-commerce portal Amazon. On receiving the parcel, Sandesh was shocked to find that the Maximum Retail Price printed on the label was Rs.125/- only. He immediately informed Amazon about the unfair trade practice that Cloudbtail India had indulged in. When Amazon did not respond, Sandesh filed a complaint against Cloudbtail, Amazon, and Eveready, in a Bengaluru Consumer Forum. On hearing the case, the Forum condemned Cloudbtail for charging excess money from consumers and ordered the company to repay the sum of Rs.125/- to Sandesh, along with compensation of Rs. 5000/- for the ordeal he went through and Rs. 3000/- towards litigation costs. *Source: Times of India.*

## மதுரையில் காலாவதி சாக்லேட் கோடவுனுக்கு "சீல்"

மதுரையில் காலாவதி சாக்லேட் கோடவுனுக்கு உணவு பாதுகாப்பு துறை அதிகாரிகள் சீல் வைத்தனர்.

மதுரை காமராஜர் ரோடு முனிசாலையில் உணவு பாதுகாப்பு நியமன அலுவலர் சோமசுந்தரம் தலைமையிலான அதிகாரிகள் நேற்று சோதனையிட்டனர். ஒரு கடையில் காலாவதியான சாக்லேட், மிட்டாய், பண்டங்களை விற்குது தெரிந்தது.

சந்தேகம் அடைந்த அதிகாரிகள் அந்த கடை உரிமையாளருக்கு சொந்தமான கோடவுனிலும் சோதனையிட்டனர். அங்கு குவியல், குவியலாக விலை உயர்ந்த சாக்லேட் மற்றும் மிட்டாய் வகைகள் விற்பனைக்காக இருப்பு வைக்கப்பட்டிருந்தன. அவை அனைத்தும் காலாவதியானவை. அவற்றை அதிகாரிகள் பறிமுதல் செய்தனர். கோடவுனுக்கும் சீல் வைத்தனர்.

இன்னும் பல கடைகளில் காலாவதியான உணவுப் பண்டங்கள் விற்கப்படலாம் என்ற சந்தேகம் எழுந்துள்ளது. கைப்பற்றிய பொருட்கள் வெளிநாட்டு தயாரிப்பை போன்று உள்ளன. காலாவதியாகும் பண்டங்களை திருட்டுத்தனமாக இறக்குமதி செய்து, "ரீபேக்கிங்" செய்து விற்கின்றனரா என்ற சந்தேகம் எழுந்துள்ளது.

உணவு பாதுகாப்பு நியமன அலுவலர் சோமசுந்தரம் பள்ளிக் குழந்தைகள் ஜாக்கிரதையாக இருக்க வேண்டும். காலாவதியான பண்டங்களால் பல நோய்கள் ஏற்படும். கூடுமானவரை வீட்டில் தயாரிக்கப்பட்ட உணவுகளையே குழந்தைகளுக்கு வழங்குங்கள் என்றும் காலாவதியான தின்பண்டங்கள் விற்போரை குறிவைத்து நடவடிக்கை எடுக்க உள்ளோம் என்று கூறினார்.



# CAG

Citizen consumer and civic Action Group

CAG is a 34 year old non profit, non political, professional organization working towards protecting citizen's rights in consumer and environmental issues and promoting good governance including transparency, accountability and participatory decision making.

The complaints cell at CAG addresses specific problems of consumers. Also CAG regularly conducts consumer awareness programmes for schools, colleges and special target groups.

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