

**What is the scope of future work on product safety issues ?
What role could the OECD play ?
Consumer perspective**

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INC is a French State agency, which is in charge :

- of providing expertise and advice to the 18 French consumers organizations ;
- of delivering information to the public on consumers matters and consumers protection.
- INC is publishing a monthly magazine, called “*60 millions de consommateurs*” (“60 millions consumers”), which sells 200 000 copies per month (average) ;
- INC also produces a short TV programme, called “Consomag”, broadcasted through 4 French public channels and on our own website, www.conso.net ; each programme is watched by 2 millions people (average).

In our magazine, as in our TV programme, we are often dealing with safety products issues. Thus, our point of view on the scope of future work to be done is therefore based on :

- our analysis of French consumers organizations demands, as far as safety products is concerned ;
- our analysis of the demands and complaints expressed by our readers and TV viewers.

To put it briefly, because these topics have been widely discussed today, we think we will have to face three main challenges in the next future :

- Products safety is a global issue, because markets are global.
- The growing number of new products put on the market and the high number of new products which includes innovative processes requires a strong improvement of consumer information.
- The dramatic increase of the number of counterfeit products and the wider range of products concerned, including common consumer goods (and not only luxury goods as before), is a threat for consumers.

Considering this three challenges, we should focus on three main objectives :

- 1) Developing standardization, with a larger involvement of the consumers organizations
- 2) Supporting and improving market surveillance by State authorities, but also through the independent expertise of consumers organizations
- 3) Improving products information, especially through independent medias.

1) Developing standardization, with a larger involvement of the consumers organizations

- Consumers organizations should participate to the standardization process, at both national, European and international level. Their point of view is indeed helpful to improve the quality of the standards ; it can be useful to get their analysis on consumer's behaviours, needs and opinions.
- But at the same time, consumer's organizations must be supported, so that their involvement in the standardization processes is effective. It requires improving their level expertise, an investment in training and providing them with the most accurate information.

INC in France is running such a programme, designed to support consumers' organizations and financed by the Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs.

2) Supporting and improving market surveillance by State authorities, but also through the independent expertise of consumers organizations

- The French consumers organization called *UFC Que choisir ?*, on the one hand, and INC, on the other hand, are engaged in product comparisons and testing. This enable consumers making informed choices on the market based on :
 - cost comparisons,
 - quality differences,
 - but also safety criteria.

For instance, we recently produced and published a test on swimming pools alarms systems. Our test proves that most of these systems were not efficient. This survey helped the French authority in charge of the market surveillance (the DGCCRF) to take the adequate measures¹.

- But as markets are now global, we will have to work, more and more in the future, at an international level, with other consumers organizations and specialized agencies, in order to :
 - identify the unsafe products,
 - share the costs of making such product comparisons and tests.

3) Improving products information, especially through independent medias.

- Consumers have to use products as indicated by the manufacturer. But they have to be well-informed. Simplified product information guides, with prominent safety instructions, including clear diagrams and properly translated text, should be systematically delivered to consumers.
- Developing prevention campaigns is also necessary, through a wide range of medias, in order to reach the various publics concerned.

¹ DGCCRF stands for : Direction générale de la concurrence, de la consommation et de la répression des fraudes.

With the French Consumer Safety Commission (a public independent authority) and the private insurance company MACIF, INC has published a White Paper "Preventing Day-To-Day Accidents" in October 2008².

The White Paper contains various recommendations for a coordinated national policy for prevention. This policy should be founded equally on a commitment from the public authorities and the voluntary and private sectors.

Following this publication, the French Secretary of State for Industry and Consumer Affairs has decided to create a web portal (it was one of the White Paper proposals). This web portal will be on line on January 2009 and run by INC. Dedicated to the public, the portal will gather information coming first from public bodies, and then from all the stakeholders involved in the initiative since its start : voluntary and private sectors, community and industry. It will be promoted through various medias and especially by TV. We hope that this web portal will be the first step of a joint action launched in order to improve information on risks and product safety.

Thank you very much for your attention.

² The White Paper and its summary is available at : <www.conso.net/accidentsviecourante.htm>. The summary contains an English version.