

CONSUMER REPORT Tougher cases harder to crack

Hard-sided luggage may be heavy and inconvenient to squeeze into a car trunk or closet, but it really protects whatever's inside. Or does it?

Editors at Consumer Reports tried an experiment. They packed two typical molded-plastic, hard-sided cases and two top-selling soft-sided cases. Into each were placed a carton of eggs swaddled in thick padding.

The suitcases were put into the "luggage tumbler," where 100 metal wheels carried a suitcase toward the top of the wheel's arc, then let it fall, over and over.

Before the wheel had made 50 revolutions, a couple of the eggs in the hard-sided cases had broken. All the eggs in the soft-sided cases lasted 100 revolutions. The soft-sided cases absorbed the blows while the hard shell of the molded plastic cases transmitted the impact to the hard shell of the eggs.

Hard-sided cases do not protect fragile cargo better than soft luggage when thrown around, do they protect better? Let us see. To find out, the four typical cases were again packed with swaddled eggs. Each case was laid on the floor and stepped on.

The hard-sided cases came out triumphant — the molded-plastic supported the 200-pound load and the eggs remained intact. The soft-sided cases yielded to the weight, and eggs in one fabric-covered bag were smashed.

Hard-sided cases have another advantage over soft-sided cases: They can be a bit easier to haul around. The big hard-sided cases tested weighed at least 19 pounds, but the weight of the bag itself may not matter. By the time you pack a big bag, soft or hard, it will end up so heavy that you won't want to roll it whenever possible. Hard-sided cases accommodate better wheel designs. A hard shell allows bigger, more widely set wheels than can be appended to a soft-sided bag. Wide wheels roll easier.

A suitcase should suit the traveler. Before you buy any piece of luggage, look it over carefully, and check to make sure:

- The handle fits your hand.
- You are neither too tall nor too short to comfortably pull the case on wheels.
- All the straps, latches, zippers and buckles work smoothly.
- The case is finished neatly.
- The case has enough compartments to accommodate what you like to take on trips.

The Samsonite Silhouette Valet was exceptionally maneuverable and costs only \$150. Consumer Reports rates it a Best Buy.

CONSUMERS BENEVOLENT BASHER

There's a market for Mace, and the public is responding to its "humane" temporary disabling of would-be assailants.

By ERIC LACITIS

If you want to find out what really concerns America, flip through the colorful TV channels that run those "talk-shows," the advertisements pretending to be talk shows.

Among these ads costs millions of dollars of airtime. The companies know very quickly if they've got a product that sells. If that 1,400 number isn't ringing off the hook, the ad is yanked.

In recent months you may have noticed a new kind of infomercial. It is the infomercial for Mace.

"I wouldn't be surprised if the word 'Mace' were recognized by 90 percent of Americans, mostly from hearing about it in news stories and word-of-mouth."

"Unfortunately, personal safety is a serious concern today, but you don't have to feel defenseless," the ad says. "Just aim, spray and walk away."

When was the first time you heard of Mace?

If we're middle-aged, maybe it was when a cop sprayed you during a Vietnam War protest.

If you're younger, in your 20s, maybe you were also in an encounter with a cop, although the demonstration was probably about a different issue. I saw police use Mace this past fall at a University of Washington football game, as they went after students taking down a goal post.

Mace is actually a chemical called chlorobutane. It's sprayed in liquid form. It doesn't have to hit you in the face. In the chest will do. Within a second or two, it has paralyzed enough to cause "profuse and uncontrolled" sweating, shortness of breath and a painful burning sensation.

The rights to it are owned by an Ohio firm called De-Tec. It sells Mace only to law enforcement, from small cops to the "finger" version that looks like a fire extinguisher.

Three years ago, Personal Security bought the "civilian" rights to Mace. I believed this was a product whose mass-market use had come. The sides the infomercial, it also put together



This mini-Mace weapon is gaining popularity among women.

or some magazine ads.

You may not have seen these, though they appeared in publications such as *Northing 89*.

Not surprisingly, the infomercial for Mace has a lot of testimonials from women, such as:

"My husband and I like to walk, but sometimes he works late. Now that I carry Mace, I don't worry about being late."

The infomercial keeps repeating how Mace is "humane." Presumably, women feel more at ease with a humane

weapon. The ad explains that even if you Mace somebody straight in the eye, they wouldn't be permanently hurt.

The ad shows the little canister of Mace attached to a key ring. The commercial shows a demonstration on how to spray it.

The assistant, in of course, a man. He is dressed in dark clothing, wearing wrap-around sunglasses. Sprint, sport. Run to safety.

As I said, infomercials are a good way to find out what concerns America.

CONSUMER NOTES

Staff and wire reports

Protection from inside pilferers

The House Detective is a new, small, light-activated alarm that sounds as soon as an off-limit drawer or door is opened. It also could be handy for keeping children out of medicine cabinets or cleaning supplies.

The plastic, 2½-by-2½-inch alarm registers 90 decibels and runs on a 9-volt battery. It has a four-to-seven-second delay, allowing the user to get in or disarm.

House Detective costs \$11.95 (battery not included), plus \$3 shipping and handling. It is available from Berk International, P.O. Box 529, Garden Grove, Calif. 92645.

Clean car without water

If you want to keep your car clean and shiny without wasting a second — and conserve water, as well — consider 3 Minute Detailer, which can be used on paint, chrome, rubber and glass.

Recently introduced by Irvine, Calif.-based Eagle One, the protective coating will keep your car relatively free of dust, according to a company spokesman. Start out with a clean car and spray on 3 Minute Detailer, then wipe it off with a soft cloth. Company representatives say that if you use the detailer every two or three days, you won't have to wash your car for three weeks or so.

The detailer doesn't scratch or streak the paint and leaves a protective finish on the car. A 15-ounce spray bottle can be used on a regular-size automobile 19 to 23 times. It is available nationwide for a suggested retail price of \$4.95 at Chief Auto Parts, Pep Boys, Western Auto and other automotive stores. If you can't find it in your area, contact Eagle One, 11 Chrysler, Irvine, Calif. 92714, 1-800-outside California.

Communicate with doctor

When a doctor prescribes medication, you expect it to help, right? Well, it may not, furthermore, it can make matters worse if you haven't given your doctor complete information and made sure you've gotten the same in return.

To help you know what specific information to give and what questions to ask, the Food and Drug Administration has a pamphlet called *Know About Your Doctor* (Item 3378). For your free copy, write to the Consumer Information Center, Dept. 3378, Pueblo, Colo. 81009.

Study of health risks related to occupation raises many questions

By DIANE ROAN

Roofers are three times more likely than the average person to die of hypertension. Secretaries die of breast cancer at rates 50 percent higher than other women workers. Male dentists and physicians have suicide rates twice that of men in other jobs.

These are some of the startling, controversial findings from a new California report on health risks related to occupation.

The findings are statistical links that do not necessarily determine causality — there is no proof, for example, that something about being a secretary causes breast cancer. But occupational safety and health experts say the report illustrates the need to identify possible health risks linked to particular jobs.

No one is saying that will be easy.

"You can, to some degree, determine the elements in the work-

place that would be contributing to illness," said Judy Erickson, an occupational health risk researcher at the University of Southern California. "But it's a monster, monster puzzle."

In recent years, certain "right-to-know" laws have focused attention on job-related health risks by requiring employers to alert workers to potentially dangerous substances.

And, with workers' compensation claims citing job stress on the rise, concern is mounting about working conditions that might contribute to health problems, Erickson said.

Experts generally agree that, after exposure to toxins, job stress will emerge as a leading determinant of overall health. "That seems to be where the evidence is pointing right now," Erickson said. "Stress claims are going up. California is leading the nation in this."

Some occupational health risks

are obvious. It's no surprise, for example, that construction workers have a higher rate of accidental falls.

But gauging just how much jobs contribute to illness or death is a tricky business that experts are just beginning to explore, Erickson said.

Dr. S. Leonard Byrne, an epidemiologist at the School of Public Health at the University of California, Berkeley, observed: "When you look at jobs and you look at disease outcomes, we can't explain the (statistical link) more than half of all the diseases we see."

The new report confirms that assessment.

The California Department of

Health Services' occupational mortality survey is the first ever to try to remove some factors that contribute to illness — such as alcohol consumption, smoking and socioeconomic status — to isolate effects of occupational hazards.

When these lifestyle factors were neutralized statistically, much of the variation in death rates among occupational groups disappeared, researchers found. But there were striking exceptions.

"We have lost a very broad net, looking at all different occupational categories without focusing on anything in particular. But there were some findings I thought were remarkable," said James Beaumont.

nothing else quite like it. Some roofers breathe petroleum fumes from tar (which could contribute to hypertension) and deaths among agricultural workers was 60 percent above the average rate for all occupations.

The high rate of injury in agricultural occupations was also surprising to him. Beaumont said, "We all thought of agriculture as dangerous, but this quantifies for California, how much higher the accident rate is."

The suicide rate among physicians and dentists was also very high. "This has been raised before, and this study substantiated it. There is a lot of speculation about the cause, but stress is No. 1."

Job stress and accidents might explain high death rates for some occupations, Beaumont said. But other unusual findings are harder to explain, such as higher rates of death from hypertension among roofers.

"It is a very different kind of job," Beaumont said. "There is

reponse "Father So-and-so." The concern thought the letter would offend Catholics.

"I'll say one thing for Falwell and Swaggart, they're not you joke about them," Carvey remarks. "But the Catholic Church has a lot of power."

Carvey was raised in a Lutheran church in Northern California but doesn't say whether he attends church regularly. His wife, Paula, is Catholic but not especially observant, he says.

Carvey's own beliefs are simple: "You know what the hell is going on. And all the religious leaders know they don't know. That's why they have their robes and candles and books and they're constantly telling each other, 'You really do believe, don't you?'"

"But I don't want to be a reverse Church Lady, judging anyone who believes. I wish I could make that kind of faith, but I have to be honest. And I don't believe anyone up there is going to strike me down for being honest."

SUDS

FROM PAGE 10

fermenting time varies from weeks to a matter of days.

You can't say that the cost is forbidding. Equipment and supplies start at less than \$50.

But you can say that a certain amount of patience is required. That's because the fermenting time varies from weeks to other country to a matter of days in South Florida.

"Everything goes faster here," says Randy Morgan, owner of Wine & Three by You in South Miami. "And that's a bonus. You can start drinking it faster."

Cheers

According to a profile compiled by the Homebrewers Association, most of the bodies behind all this brewing are white males in their 30s with some college — and may be a few hangovers — behind them.

And their numbers are growing.

Though the association has experienced steady growth since its inception in 1979, current mem-

bership is up 30 percent from last year.

"I think of it as the meowbell effect," Fagan says.

"To convince people that homebrewed beer is special, you get them to taste it. And the more you taste it, the more you want to make it homebrew."

Considering its popularity, it's good to know that this pastime is perfectly legal in most states, including Florida, which gave its nod to home brewing in 1986.

The law says that, without a permit or a license, you can brew up to 100 gallons a year for personal use.

Make that 200 gallons for a household, "which is plenty," says businessman Morgan. "That can keep you floating."

In fact, 200 gallons would fill enough can to keep you supplied with merrily a six-pack a day.

And if you make something worth drinking, your beer budget won't break the bank.

With store-bought beer ranging from \$5 for a domestic six-pack to \$14 for imported, homebrewed beer offers a cheap alternative — from \$1.25 to \$2 or so.

Another round

For do-it-yourselfers like

McCarthy and his housemate Evelyn Robinson, price is hardly a factor.

"I make beer today because it's an art. It's something creative," says McCarthy, who carries his living as an electronics technician. "And sometimes it's really good."

Then again, sometimes it's just plain awful.

The couple vividly recall McCarthy's headlock Ale, which used molasses instead of corn sugar, and which brewed in the cooking process. That batch went down the kitchen sink instead of over the top.

"Aging didn't help," Robinson insists. "It only made it worse."

In addition to just plain old awful, a bad batch of beer can taste as acidic as vinegar. Or as sweet as buttercream. Or as metallic as a cello.

But when it's good, it doesn't need description.

"It's very good, it disappears," McCarthy says, describing the ultimate taste test.

The not-so-good stays in the closet.

FROM PAGE 10

False superiority, not Christianity, is Carvey's target

of Mississippi and a board member of the National Religious Broadcasters association. "His radio ministry should be off limits to homosexuals, as they were in the 1952 Motion Picture Code. If you defrock a politician or a scientist or Bob Love, you're not dealing with an issue of faith. What if we made fun of Orthodox Jews for their armbands or long beards or coats? Who is to say that someone's belief structure is wrong?"

Now, Dana Carvey for the defense.

In point of fact, he says, the Church Lady already has drifted off to greener pastures, answering Donald and Ivana Trump inquiries — and the real Rob Lowe. "Now that the TV preachers are out of the news, it's not a

LADY

pulpit for bashing them anymore.

Carvey insists the Church Lady is not about Christianity or as much as false superiority. "It's about a particular manifestation of a North American WASP who has the truth for everyone, who sees everything in black and white. People like Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker and Jerry Falwell make me mad."

"But other comedians, like Robin Williams, have done preachers, and I wanted to try something different. Like the Church Lady with her orthopedic stockings."

As for the charge of lampooning Christianity more than blacks or Jews, Carvey protests that "the heritage is different. Blacks and Jews came to this country with a heritage of martyrdom. It's hard to play it that way for Anglo-Saxons."

Network censors — yes, they still around — do remain in occasionally. Carvey wanted to have the Church Lady read a fictional letter from a gay man who confessed he had sex in the streets — and signed his con-

reponse "Father So-and-so."

"The concern thought the letter would offend Catholics. I'll say one thing for Falwell and Swaggart, they're not you joke about them," Carvey remarks. "But the Catholic Church has a lot of power."

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