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Woman 'eyes' solution to design problem

By BARBARA UNDERWOOD

Imogene Angell has a frustration file. Included in it is a cartoon with the caption, "I can't help you but I can give you a list of 13 different government agencies that handle your problem." Mrs. Angell believes she has contacted all 13 of them and more.

The file also contains many letters, reports, clippings and other material pertaining to eyeglasses. It all began 18 months ago when Mrs. Angell, a Birmingham resident, had a minor automobile accident which she blamed on her then-new eyeglasses.

Since then she has waged a one-woman campaign to get the people who could do something to take notice. She sees a few ripples but it has not been easy.

The problem Mrs. Angell would like someone to consider is the restriction of peripheral vision caused by the design of most eyeglasses today. Specifically, the temples (side pieces) are on a horizontal line at the center of the eye, thus obstructing side vision.

"FINDING THE right place to get some action took letter after letter after letter," she said last week. "I kept being referred to another person or agency."

Mrs. Angell said she can't estimate how many letters she has written or the hours she has devoted to her campaign. While she is beginning to see results, progress is minimal on getting something done to ban the frames she considers dangerous.

One positive result was a change the way Secretary of State examiners test peripheral vision before driver's licenses are issued.

In the past, instructions for the Titmus Vision Tester used by driver license examiners instructed the operator to "request subjects wearing glasses to remove them for the perimeter tests" because "the temples and frames of glasses may interfere with their seeing the pin-hole lights at one or more angles."

But a February 1978 memo to the Motor Vehicle Bureau says, "Every driver license applicant wearing a style of glasses that could interfere with side vision should be advised of the possible driving hazard."

THE MEMO also suggests that the applicant take the test with and without the glasses.

But when Mrs. Angell did a spot check of a area Secretary of State offices recently, the recommendation was not being followed at all locations checked.

During a 1977 vacation, Mrs. Angell took her case to the Food and Drug Administration in Silver Spring, Md., and Consumers Union in Mt. Vernon, N.Y. Both organizations expressed interest, but little has happened since.

"Many people are interested, but they don't keep in touch," she said. "I can't follow it up by telephone because it is too expensive. I write two letters for every one I get back."

"The Food and Drug Administration believes in citizen input and sets aside money for it but none has ever been offered to me. Nobody is giving me a cent to do this."

MRS. ANGELL could have gone to a meeting of the Ophthalmic Device Classification Panel in July 1977 but didn't because of the expense.

However, she did get a transcript of the panel's meeting at which eyeglass safety was discussed. She is convinced that eventually performance standards will be developed to deal with the matter "but whether they will be adequate or not is questionable."

And it takes at least four years to set a standard, she said.

"I talked with the person in charge of setting standards and he said there is no way of dealing with the immediate problem," she said.

A QUICKER and simpler solution would be to require frames to be labeled to alert people buying them that they might obstruct vision.

"It could be done, but I am quite sure it won't," she said.

Safety standards exist for industrial glasses and motorcycle helmets which are worn by far fewer people than the number who wear eyeglasses.

As a result of her campaign, Mrs. Angell has been asked to represent the Michigan Citizens Lobby on the Southeastern Michigan Consumer Forum, an advisory panel to the Detroit district office of the Food and Drug Administration.

Opticians, optometrists and eyeglasses designers must all cooperate to make wearers of eyeglasses aware of the potential danger of certain frames, Mrs. Angell believes.

Manufacturers want flexibility so they can appeal to style and fashion," she said. "Designers must change their point of view."

She would like to see a California law restricting the width of eyeglass temples applied in Michigan, but with a narrower temple width than is specified in California.

The California law states, "No person shall operate a motor vehicle when wearing glasses having a temple width of one-half inch or more if any part of such temple extends below the horizontal center of the lens so as to interfere with lateral vision."

The most heartening progress Mrs. Angell has seen so far was an article in the January 1978 issue of Vogue magazine. The article advocates glasses with temples well-removed from the range of peripheral vision.

Mrs. Angell no longer wears her glasses when driving although she changed to bifocals on purpose 18 months ago so she would not have to take her glasses on and off so much. But that was before she had the accident.

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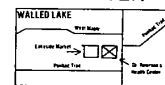
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