

consumer mallbag

Do home water filters do a good job? How much do they cost? Do you have any information on the different brands?
S.T. Birmingham

Concern over the purity of drinking water has led to a proliferation of home-use water cleaners. These units can cost anywhere from \$10 for the simplest pour-through or faucet filter to several hundred dollars for a line bypass unit installed where the water supply enters the house. All types use activated carbon filters and vary widely in effectiveness and longevity.

According to testing done by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the effectiveness and longevity of a carbon filter depend partly on its design, the quality and amount of the filtering material and the volume of water passing through it and the length of time the water is in contact with the filter.

Tests also revealed that a filter can start out being very effective, perhaps in the 90-percent range, but then drop in efficiency as the filter pores become clogged and cleaning ability progressively deteriorates.

For more information and a list of test filters, write to the Public Information Center, Environmental Protection Agency, Washington, D.C. 20460.

READER COMMENT: From time to time, readers share their frustrations and suggestions with this columnist. Some end up as questions in this column while others due to space limitations are just filed for future reference.

Going through them the other day, I decided to share them with

you occasionally. Remember that these are the views of the readers like yourself. So if you have something to complain about or explain about, this will give you a chance to be heard.

Why can't magazines be recycled? I've heard two different reasons from people in the paper recycling business: the binding is a glue that messed up their machines; and that the glossy paper itself is not recyclable.

Sometimes I shudder to think of the billions of tons of paper thrown away by people each year in the form of magazines. I realize that you can leave them in hospital waiting rooms, doctor's offices, etc., but that still is not actually recycling the paper. Someone else is just going to throw them away. Seems to me that magazine publishers should be required to use paper suitable for recycling.

And why don't more people put their newspaper out wrapped separately on trash pickup days? In my neighborhood, at least one or two people make the rounds each time and pick up newspapers that people have set out. This far more beneficial to the environment than throwing them in the garbage. It's a good idea ecologically and economically.

I think people should be reminded to do this, and your column would be the ideal vehicle to get this message across. Thank you.

Consumer Mailbag: answers your questions. Address mail to Grace R. Gluskin, Concern Detroit, 1 Northfield Plaza, Troy 48068.

Under new state law

Grocers can refuse dirty bottles

Michigan grocers have the right to refuse to cash in unsanitary deposit bottles and cans under a law enacted in March.

The new law also allows grocers to refuse shoppers who want to cash in more than \$25 worth of bottles and cans on any given day.

Public Act 39 of 1982, signed into law by Gov. Milliken on March 16, amends the state's mandatory deposit law. That law was passed in public referendum in November 1976.

Under the amended law, grocers can turn down a customer trying to return bottles and cans containing anything other than "the residue of its original contents."

"We won't be waving the law in our customers' faces," says Charles Chandler, executive director of the Michigan Food Dealers Association. "But at least we have a way now to handle the occasional abuser who wants to use the corner grocery as a garbage dump."

Michigan grocers are learning to live with the mandatory deposit law, according to Chandler. "We've built the storage rooms, set up systems for handling and storage. We've hired new staff," he says.

'We won't be waving the law in our customers' faces. But at least we have a way now to handle the occasional abuser who wants to use the corner grocery as a garbage dump.'

"These are costs we simply cannot reduce."

"We won't be waving the law in our customers' faces," says Charles Chandler, executive director of the Michigan Food Dealers Association. "But at least we have a way now to handle the occasional abuser who wants to use the corner grocery as a garbage dump."

"Customers should rinse out their cans and bottles before they bring them back to us," Chandler noted.

They should use bottles and cans cartons or boxes when possible. When they need to bring their cans and bottles back in bags, paper shopping bags are preferred.

"Finally, shoppers should not let cans and

bottles stack up," he says. "Returning cans and bottles regularly with assist retailers a great deal and shoppers will also find that their homes will stay fresher and that it's so much easier not to have to return basketfuls of containers."

The MFDA director said most shoppers "do a good job" of following common courtesy when they return their cans and bottles.

"But a small number of abusers have created big headaches for us all," he added.

ONE AREA of cost now needed, he said, is pest control services. A study conducted by the state agriculture department found that Michigan grocers spent nearly \$3 million more for pest control services in 1980 than in 1978, before the law went into effect.

Chandler said Michigan grocers will launch a statewide campaign this spring to say "Thank you for bringing 'em back clean."

The campaign will be sponsored jointly by MFDA, Michigan Department of Agriculture and Keep Michigan Beautiful Committee.

Public still wary of spending, 24 says U-M consumer survey

Consumer confidence in the U.S. economy fell in fourth quarter 1981, reversing nearly all of the modest gain recorded since mid-1980, according to a recent Survey of Consumer Attitudes conducted by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research (ISR).

"High interest rates coupled with heightened concerns about spreading unemployment have not only directly resulted in less favorable evaluations of current business conditions, but also have dampened confidence in the ability of government economic policies to promote more favorable future prospects."

"Buying attitudes remained near record low levels during the entire year of 1981 and foreshadow no better prospects for the first half of 1982."

"Large discretionary purchases will continue to be responsive to trends in interest rates, but more favorable employment and real income trends are necessary before sustained growth in housing and vehicle sales can be expected."

"In addition to the effect to interest rates," domestic car sales have been adversely affected by consumer reactions to high prices, as well as consumer willingness to buy imported cars based on price comparisons."

THE OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1981 surveys of a national sample of more than 2,000 respondents recorded the ISR Index of Consumer Sentiment at 65.7, a decline of 9.1 index points from the third quarter 1981 figure and 6.4 points below the year earlier reading.

The report noted that the fourth quarter decline reversed nearly all of the improvement in consumer sentiment recorded since mid-1980. (February 1980: 100).

Highlights from the fourth quarter 1981 survey: An increased awareness of unfavorable business developments was recorded in late 1981, with spreading unemployment the dominant concern. Seventy-one percent of all families though business conditions has worsened during the past year, a sharp rise from the 51 percent recorded in the prior quarter. With lower inflation rates, consumers more frequently viewed unemployment as the more serious economic problems now facing the nation.

By the close of 1981, nearly two-thirds of all consumers expected bad times financially in the country as a whole during the next 12 months. On balance, confidence in government economic policies designed to combat both inflation and unemployment declined from mid-year levels, but remained substantially higher than in prior years.

"The results suggest that declines in the current and expected rates of inflation helped to offset con-

'When foreign products cost less or have better quality, social principle yields to economic self interest.'

cerns over rising unemployment, especially among higher income families," the U-M report stated.

Attitudes toward buying conditions for houses started 1981 at an all-time low level and by year-end established a new record low level in the fourth quarter of 1981 just 18 percent of consumers rated house buying conditions favorably. At the last peak level in second quarter 1977, some 63 percent of respondents held favorable attitudes toward house buying.

Car-buying attitudes were unfavorable throughout 1981 and at year's end were somewhat more depressing than at the start.

In the fourth quarter, 54 percent of all families rated buying conditions unfavorably prospective car buyers, the report indicated, "have come to expect both higher sticker prices and continued use of price discounts and rebate programs to promote sales, and as a result have become more sensitive to car pricing policies."

Asked about domestic vs. imported products, America consumers voiced a preference for domestic-made products — other things being equal. Fifty-eight percent to families indicated they would buy American, while just 4 percent held a general preference for imports.

But of the 58 percent that initially favored American products, only about half (25 percent) still favored that choice if American products were higher priced than similar foreign products. Only 17 percent would prefer to buy American-made products if foreign product quality appeared to be higher.

The report concluded: "When foreign products cost less or have better quality, social principle yields to economic self interest."

In the 1981 final quarter, 42 percent of all families expected interest rates to decline in the year ahead, compared with 27 percent that expected further interest rate increases.

Postponement of purchases due to high interest rates were reported by 33 percent of all households in late 1981. The most frequently postponed purchases were vehicles (13 percent), housing and home repairs (13 percent), followed by household durables (8 percent) and clothing and other items (4 percent).

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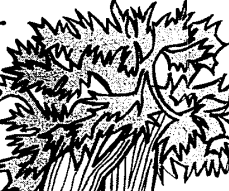
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