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### **Instructions Are There to be Read – ALL of Them!**

It's that time of year again for the giving and receiving of presents. Some are pretty straightforward like clothes. Everyone knows how to put on a jumper; however, when in need of cleaning not every item of clothing can be treated in the same way. The label usually informs of the best way to do this. Those who don't bother to read could end up with a shrunken sweater, or bemoaning the sad fact that the rest of the stuff it was washed with has taken on varying shades of patchy pink.

Other items such as electronic gizmos generally come with an instruction leaflet; but who ever bothers to read them? It's a CD player, right? You plug it in, open the cover, pop in a CD, close the cover and, Hey Presto, it plays. Who needs instructions? Well, they might be handy if you want to know about other more complex functions like play lists and skipping, etcetera. When it comes to DVD recorders and there's no kid to set it up for you, having a squiz at the printed words of wisdom might prove useful.

Many of today's handy devices are battery-operated and re-chargeable. They also have instructions about how-to and what-NOT-to-do. The wrong way could result in damage to the unit; or, even worse, overheating and starting a fire in the bedroom. That's no exaggeration – it happens frequently.

Any written safety precautions may be casually disregarded because they all seem to say the same things. Whether they do or not, there's still no harm in having a quick read. Advice that a particular device should be kept out of the reach of children is an important reminder; plus, ignoring those warnings about electric shock might mean a trip to the hospital.

Nearly all products, particularly glues, paints and chemicals, have labels somewhere on the packaging listing the correct way to use them; and there'll be a disclaimer exonerating the manufacturer from responsibility should these instructions not be followed to the letter. There will also be safety warnings and remedies for treating injuries, should whatever's in the tin or tube come into contact with the skin, eyes, or is swallowed. This information should be read, learned and inwardly digested before even opening the container.

As an example, I recall selling a customer a can of contact adhesive. I drew his attention to the instructions on the can - to provide plenty of ventilation, and to avoid the presence of any naked flames. He returned to the shop next day to report that he'd forgotten about the pilot light in the gas water-heater. Following a huge flash-bang, his kitchen was decorated with soot and he was minus his eyebrows!

I daresay he incurred other injuries and might have needed some medication. I wonder if he bothered to read the instructions for them? They would have been there somewhere, maybe on the tube or the box it came in; and there might even have been an enclosed leaflet. When it comes to any kind of medication it pays to be extra careful,

especially with drugs. Are they to be taken with, before, or after food? How will they be affected by alcohol? If a person is already on another regular medication, what could happen when the two get together – might one nullify the benefit of the other; or, perhaps between them, be the unwitting creators of a new, potentially dangerous chemical?

And don't forget the herbal remedies and so-called "natural" supplements which are taken daily. On their own they are probably quite harmless; but in conjunction with a prescribed medication, how can you be sure they won't combine to become a lethal cocktail? The pharmacist knows and can offer advice. In the absence of this, there's the Internet where drugs and medicines can be Googled to find out do's, don'ts and side-effects. It isn't hard; and it could be a life saver!

Please read those important instructions so that you and yours stay safe and happy this holiday season.

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