

The Communicator

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Greetings

At the risk of irritating the feckless gods of weather, it appears that summer is upon us. We are a stiff, mosquito-bitten, sun-bleached bunch here in Moscow, as we have enjoyed getting our gardens in, our weeds pulled, and our shrubbery pruned.

Holiday for *The Communicator*

In the spirit of taking summer breaks, and knowing many of you are busiest in the summer months, *The Communicator* will be taking both July and August off this year. This newsletter will be the last until September.

In the News: For Your Clients

Food Preservation Focus of Workshops in Lapwai, Moscow, Lewiston, and Online in June

Home canning and food preservation workshops sponsored by University of Idaho Extension in Lapwai June 11, Moscow June 12, and Lewiston June 13 will offer a food safety approach.

Carol Hampton, Boundary County Extension educator, will lead the workshops with help from local Extension educators. Hampton also will teach an online food preservation class, *Preserve @ Home* beginning June 22, and the registration deadline for it is June 12.

Both Lapwai and Moscow hands-on workshops will run about five hours and offer detailed information about basic food preservation techniques using both water bath and pressure canners.

The June 11 Lapwai session will be held at Commodity Foods beginning at 10 am and sponsored by the University of Idaho Extension, Nez Perce Reservation. The registration and prepayment deadline is June 9 and may be made by contacting Valdasue Steele, Nez Perce Reservation Extension educator at Lapwai.



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The June 12 Moscow session will be held on campus in the University of Idaho Food Lab in Niccolls 101 beginning at 9 am. The registration and payment deadline is June 5 through Karen Richel at the Latah County Extension office in the Latah County Courthouse at 522 S. Adams Room 208 in Moscow.

The Moscow workshop will provide hands-on instruction with participants' own canning equipment. Participants who bring pressure canners must have their canner's gauges checked in advance, a service available at the Latah County Extension office.

The June 13 Nez Perce County Extension program at Lewiston will provide an overview and demonstration of safe food preservation principles and practices, Hampton said.

The session will focus on safe food handling principles and practices with a variety of foods. Participants will receive information about freezing and drying foods and have the opportunity to bring pressure canner gauges and lids for testing during the seminar.

Extension experts will also talk about how to increase the life of garden produce with proper harvest and storage techniques.

Hampton's online class, *Preserve @ Home*, teaches participants how to safely preserve a variety of foods and how to preserve their quality. The class provides lessons for downloading and interactive online chat sessions. The class is available to community members for \$35, and is also offered as a one-credit academic course, FCS 475—Food Preservation, for an additional fee.

More information about *Preserve @ Home* is available online at http://extension.ag.uidaho.edu/boundary/online_courses.htm.

Summer Reading

Here are a few books I hope to read this summer:

The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy: An Economist Examines the Markets, Power, and Politics of World Trade by Pietra Rivoli (Wiley, 2009, 2nd edition)

(Certainly related to dress, but also the politics of poverty—a cautionary tale, I think.)

From Publishers Weekly

During a 1999 protest of the World Trade Organization, Rivoli, an economics professor at Georgetown, looked on as an activist seized the microphone and demanded, "Who made your T-shirt?" Rivoli determined to find out. She interviewed cotton farmers in Texas, factory workers in China, labor champions in the American South, and used-clothing vendors in Tanzania. Problems, Rivoli concludes, arise not with the market, but with the suppression of the market. Subsidized farmers, and manufacturers and importers with tax breaks, she argues, succeed because they avoid the risks and competition of unprotected global trade, which in turn forces poorer countries to lower their prices to below subsistence levels in order to compete. Rivoli seems surprised by her own conclusions, and while some chapters lapse into academic prose and tedious descriptions of bureaucratic maneuvering, her writing is at its best when it considers the social dimensions of a global economy, as in chapters on the social networks of African used-clothing entrepreneurs.

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Why We Make Mistakes: How We Look Without Seeing, Forget Things in Seconds, and Are All Pretty Sure We Are Way Above Average by Joseph T. Hallinan (Broadway Books 2009)

(Even the cover is crooked.)

We forget our passwords. We pay too much to go to the gym. We think we'd be happier if we lived in California (we wouldn't), and we think we should stick with our first answer on tests (we shouldn't). Why do we make mistakes? And could we do a little better?

We human beings have design flaws. Our eyes play tricks on us, our stories change in the retelling, and most of us are fairly sure we're way above average. In *Why We Make Mistakes*, journalist Joseph T. Hallinan sets out to explore the captivating science of human error—how we think, see, remember, and forget, and how this sets us up for wholly irresistible mistakes.

In his quest to understand our imperfections, Hallinan delves into psychology, neuroscience, and economics, with forays into aviation, consumer behavior, geography, football, stock picking, and more. He discovers that some of the same qualities that make us efficient also make us error prone. We learn to move rapidly through the world, quickly recognizing patterns—but overlooking details. Which is why thirteen-year-old boys discover errors that NASA scientists miss—and why you can't find the beer in your refrigerator.

Why We Make Mistakes is enlivened by real-life stories—of weathermen whose predictions are uncannily accurate and a witness who sent an innocent man to jail—and offers valuable advice, such as how to remember where you've hidden something important. You'll learn why multitasking is a bad idea, why men make errors women don't, and why most people think San Diego is west of Reno (it's not).

Why We Make Mistakes will open your eyes to the reasons behind your mistakes—and have you vowing to do better the next time.



Hand Hygiene Talking Points

A recent article in the *Wall Street Journal* about hand washing (and H1N1 flu) provided some helpful, well researched points:

- Soap and water is the gold standard for hand washing. The article mentioned a recent

study in the journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, in which researchers applied H1N1 flu virus to the hands of 20 health-care workers. Soap and water removed slightly more virus than alcohol-based hand rubs. When volunteers left their hands unwashed, most of the virus was still present an hour after exposure.

- The mechanical process of washing is what makes it so effective. Soap molecules surround and lift the germs, friction from rubbing hands loosens them, and water rinses them down the drain.
- Experts recommend using warm water, mainly for comfort, so people will wash longer. Liquid soap is also recommended, since bar soaps can harbor germs, though these germs will rinse off with water.
- Hands should be rinsed thoroughly because residual soap can make them sore.
- The CDC has recommended that people use alcohol-based hand sanitizers when soap and water aren't available to help stop the spread of H1N1 flu. These sanitizers must be at least 60 percent alcohol to kill viruses—alcohol ruptures their cell membranes. (Alcohol effectiveness against different viruses does appear to vary.)
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth with hands.

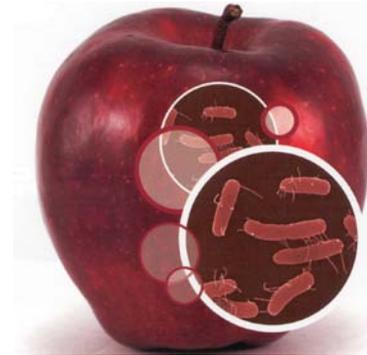
Source: M. Beck, "Put Up Your Dukes: Fighting Disease With Soap and Water," *Wall Street Journal* online, May 12, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124208945194709049.html>.

Keyword: handwashing.



Food Safety

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Levels of Pathogens in Various Raw Foods

When conducting food safety programs, we caution participants about the possible presence of pathogens on raw foods to emphasize the need to chill and cook properly, avoid cross-contamination and practice personal and kitchen hygiene. However, since a microscope is needed to see microorganisms and diagnostic tests are required to identify pathogens from benign organisms, we do not know whether a particular food actually contains pathogens. It would be useful to have data about levels of pathogens in various foods so that the approximate level of risk can be more accurately communicated.

I have been collecting research papers than measure the level of pathogen contamination in foods. Generally these papers concentrate on one or two

pathogens in one food or class of foods (for example, retail chicken or deli salads) sampled across an identified geographical region. As more of these studies are published, the amount of pathogen contamination we can expect in various foods can be summarized.

Although my file of research papers is not as comprehensive as I would like, I recently received a table where this data has been collected. The table below is from a PowerPoint slide set shared with members of a food safety list serve (Foodsafe Google Groups) by Dr. Pete Snyder, a well known retail food service food safety consultant. He has collected information about the percentages of raw foods that have found to be contaminated with various pathogens. For example, from the table it can be seen that between 40 and 100 percent of raw poultry is contaminated with *Salmonella* and 45 to 64 percent is contaminated with *Campylobacter jejuni*. About 73 percent of raw chicken is contaminated with *Staphylococcus aureus*. (Unfortunately, the slide set does not provide the references used to compile this table.)

I do not know the source of the water reported in the table to have a 30 percent contamination rate with *Giardia lamblia* and norovirus; this would not be municipal water supplies. Also note Dr. Snyder's indication that 2 percent of employees who come to work are infective from a variety of pathogens. Given the practices I sometimes observe in restaurants, this is troubling.

(By the way, in spite of the apple picture, which provides such a nice illustration, I do not have data on the percentage of apples which carry pathogens.)

Source: O. Peter Snyder, "Contaminated Food: Protecting the Consumer's Health," Slide 8, Hospitality Institute of Technology and Management, St Paul, MN, April 2, 2009, <http://www.hi-tm.com/Documents2009/Genesee-protect-cust-health.pdf>.

Keywords: food safety, foods, bacteria.

FOOD MICROBIOLOGICAL CONTAMINATION

| MICROORGANISM | SOURCE | PERCENT CONTAMINATED |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Salmonella</i> spp. | Raw poultry | 40 - 100 |
| | Raw pork | 3 - 20 |
| | Raw shellfish | 16 |
| <i>Staphylococcus aureus</i> | Raw chicken | 73 |
| | Raw pork | 13 - 33 |
| | Raw beef | 16 |
| <i>Clostridium perfringens</i> | Raw pork and chicken | 39 - 45 |
| <i>Campylobacter jejuni</i> | Raw chicken and turkey | 45 - 64 |
| <i>Escherichia coli</i> O157:H7 | Raw beef/pork/poultry | 1.5 - 3.7 |
| <i>Bacillus cereus</i> | Raw ground beef | 43 - 63 |
| | Raw rice | 100 |
| <i>Listeria monocytogenes</i> | Fresh potatoes | 26 |
| | Fresh radishes | 30 |
| <i>Yersinia enterocolitica</i> | Raw pork | 49 |
| | Raw milk | 48 |
| | Raw vegetables | 46 |
| <i>Vibrio</i> spp. | Raw seafood | 33 - 46 |
| <i>Giardia lamblia</i> , norovirus | Water | 30 |

HUMAN MICROBIOLOGICAL CONTAMINATION

| MICROORGANISM | SOURCE | PERCENT CONTAMINATED |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| <i>Shigella</i> spp., hepatitis A, norovirus, <i>E. coli</i> , <i>Salmonella</i> spp., <i>Giardia lamblia</i> | Feces | 1 in 50 (2%) of the employees who come to work each day is highly infective. |
| Norovirus | Vomit | |
| <i>Staphylococcus aureus</i> | Skin, nose, boils and skin infections | |
| <i>Streptococcus</i> Group A | Throat and skin | |



Making Time for Work and Family

Mothers do more paid work—14 hours more per week—than they did 40 years ago. They do less housework—exactly 14 hours fewer—too. But they do 4 more hours per week of childcare than in the past.

Dads are stepping up in new ways too. Men have steadily increased their participation in housework and child care over the past 30 years. And contrary to claims of some earlier studies, dads who work less than full-time don't use their extra time just to watch TV. Part-time worker dads do more housework (about an hour more) than full-time worker dads, and about 40 minutes more childcare.

But if women have given up 14 hours a week of housework and taken on 14 more hours of paid work, what else have they given up to put in 4 more hours of childcare? Here the news may be less rosy. It appears that social bonding with spouse, kin, and friends is being sacrificed to the higher standards for time with children. Compared to 20 years ago, married working moms now spend less time with their spouse—while single moms spend less time with friends and family.

These facts illustrate the on-going revolution in how Americans spend their time—what they do at work, how men and women organize family schedules, and how children and teens spend their days. To understand changes in family life and to guide policy makers—and families themselves—about the best ways to adjust to new patterns of work and parenting, researchers collect such information.



Family Development



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This in turn becomes the basis for news stories, advice columns, and television programs that citizens rely on—and are hungry for.

The American Time Use Survey is one of those key resources. (For more information on ATUS visit <http://www.bls.gov/tus/home.htm> and www.saveatus.org.) As researcher Suzanne Bianchi explains, "ATUS provides essential information about how Americans spend their time—time spent caring for children, cleaning the house, working for pay, and caring for sick adults." We all rely on these jobs being done in order to keep our society running well: but it is vital for us to know how, when, and by whom they are done in our changing social world.

"The complexity of coordinating families' work and school schedules with the need for health care, down time, cultivation of intimacy, and everyday chores presents new challenges to couples, parents, and children in the way they spend their days," explains family historian Stephanie Coontz. "Changes in time use help us understand how families cope with modern stresses—and also what happens when they cannot cope. Right now, the economy is slowing down, but many families find themselves speeding up.

Source: Council on Contemporary Families, www.contemporaryfamilies.org.

Keyword: work and family.

Concepts of Aging: Is Forty the New Thirty?

It's a common statement in the popular press, forty is the new thirty (or sixty is the new fifty), emphasizing the health and fitness experienced by so many of today's adults as they grow older. And in fact, trends in life expectancy support the concept: fewer than 25 percent of males in Western Europe lived past their 60th birthday in 1800, but today more than 90 percent do.

Older people are not just surviving, they are thriving as well, enjoying years of continued employment, volunteering, and recreation, among other activities. These trends in aging have given rise to changing retirement trends, such as the increasing age to receive full Social Security payments, or growing concerns about the abilities of pension plans to support such long-lived generations.

Trends in aging have shifted, but indicators for measuring the process have remained static. For example, national trends in aging are commonly indexed by the percentage of people over the age of 65. However, the meaning of this measure has changed considerably in the past 50 years. While members of this group in 1950 likely had major health problems with few remaining years, the same age group in 2008 is considerably healthier with many active years ahead. In fact, today we look at the group 80 years and older for the aged population likely to be impaired.

Part of the challenge in comparing across decades stems from the tradition of counting age as the number of years from birth—i.e. chronological age. That is, 65 year olds in the 1950's and those in 2008 are comparable in that they all have been on the earth for 65 years.

However, an alternative approach would be to compare the groups in terms of the number of years they can expect to live. Life expectancies for 65 year olds have increased considerably in the last half century. For example, life expectancy for 65 year old Australians and Italians increased 1.6 years per decade between 1970 and 2002. In Japan, the shift was even more dramatic, increasing 2.3 years per decade over the same time period.

Demographers Warren Sanderson and Sergei Scherbov suggest that national statistics on aging would be more informative if they were based on expected years of life for population members. For example, a woman celebrating her 30th birthday in France in 1952 had a life expectancy of 44.7 years. However, a French woman of the same age in 2005 could expect to live 54.4 years, an index Sanderson and Scherbov term "prospective age." While the women at the two time periods share a chronological age, they differ markedly in prospective age.

Using prospective age, we can make meaningful comparisons across decades. We can actually find out if, as the saying goes, 40 is the new 30. That is, do today's 40 year olds have the same number of years ahead of them as 30 year olds a half a century ago? In fact, a comparison of life expectancy data suggest that the phrase is accurate—that is, a 30 year old woman in 1952 could expect to live 44.7 years more, the same life expectancy as that of a woman turning 40 in 2005. So 40 is the new 30, at least in terms of prospective age.

Sanderson and Scherbov suggest that we learn important information using both indicators of age—chronological age as well as prospective age. The number of years since birth tells us many things—stage of childhood development, years of opportunity for education and socialization, sexual and reproductive maturity, to suggest a few examples. However, the number of years we can expect to live are significant as well as we plan for the future, considering such issues as the long term the value of educational training, our likely years of employment, and policies and plans for retirement.

Considering our angst about our chronological age as we grow older, we may not want another age to keep track of in our prospective age. But Sanderson and Scherbov suggest that the 30 year old (chronological age) woman are also 54 (prospective age). Her biggest problem might be figuring out how many candles to put on her birthday cake.

Source: Warren Sanderson & Sergei Scherbov, Rethinking Age and Aging, *Population Bulletin*, December 2008, available at www.prb.org.

Keywords: senior, retirement.

Brown Fat—A New Way to Treat Obesity?

There are two types of fat in the body, white fat which stores calories and brown fat which burns calories and generates heat. Until recently, scientists believed that brown fat was present only in infants to help them maintain their body temperature.

Brown fat appears brown in color because it is filled with mitochondria, tiny organelles that generate cellular energy. The mitochondria use enzymes that contain iron which gives the fat tissue its reddish brown color.

Three research articles, published in the April 9, 2009 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, provide new information on brown fat in humans.

In the past, researchers had difficulty locating brown fat in adults. They were able to locate brown fat in adults using a special type of scan called a Positron Emission Tomography and Computed Tomography (PET-CT) scan. The brown fat has to be actively burning glucose and produce heat before it shows up on the scan which is one reason why it was missed in the past. The other reasons brown fat was missed in the past are that adults contain a small amount, 1-2 ounces, and it is located in very specific areas of the body. In adults brown fat is found in the upper part of the back, on the side of the neck, in the dip between the collarbone and shoulder, and along the spine.

Some of their findings include:

- Thinner people have more brown fat than heavier people.
- Younger people have more brown fat than older people.
- Women had more brown fat than men.
- People who took beta blocker medication for high blood pressure had less active brown fat.

Researchers were able to activate brown fat in 96 percent of their subjects, by having them stay in a cool room (60-63°F) for several hours. They found that the greatest amount of energy that people can burn with their brown fat is 500 calories per day. Therefore, even if they find a way to stimulate



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peoples' brown fat, in order to lose weight, they would still have to decrease their calorie intake and increase their level of physical activity. The bottom line is that don't just turn down your thermostat to lose weight; you also need to eat less and be more active.

Source: <http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/abstract/360/15/1500>; <http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/full/360/15/1509>; <http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/full/360/15/1518>.

Keywords: fat, obesity.

Eating a Low Glycemic Index Breakfast Burns More Fat During Exercise

Glycemic Index (GI) measures the effects of carbohydrates on blood glucose levels. Carbohydrates that break down and enter the bloodstream quickly have a high GI. Examples of high GI foods are white bread, cornflakes, and baked potato. Carbohydrates that break down and enter the bloodstream slowly have a low GI. Whole grains, most fruits and vegetables, and brown rice are low GI foods.

Researchers at Northumbria University in the United Kingdom studied post-exercise fat oxidation (fat breakdown) in subjects that consumed either a high glycemic or low glycemic breakfast and walked for 60 minutes.

Both breakfasts contained similar amounts of carbohydrate, protein, and fat. The low glycemic index (LGI) breakfast consisted of muesli, skim milk, canned peaches, yogurt, and contained 3.5 grams of fiber. The high glycemic index breakfast (HGI) consisted of cornflakes, white bread, jam, skimmed milk, a carbonated glucose drink, and contained 1.5 grams of fiber.

Dr. Stevenson and colleagues found two benefits to eating the LGI breakfast. The first was that subjects who consumed the LGI breakfast burned more fat (7.4 grams of fat per hour) and less carbohydrate (42.5 grams of carbohydrate per hour) than the subjects who ate the high glycemic index breakfast (3.7 grams of fat and 51.6 grams of carbohydrate per hour). The second benefit was that the high fiber LGI breakfast provided more satiety and kept subjects feeling fuller for a longer period of time.

These findings suggest that eating high fiber low glycemic meals could help individuals burn more fat when they exercise.

Source: *Journal of Nutrition*, May 2009,
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glycemic_index;
<http://jn.nutrition.org/cgi/reprint/139/5/890>.

Keyword: diet.



Why People Choose Unhealthy Food Items When Healthy Food Items Are On the Menu

Most restaurants have a combination of healthy and less healthy food items on their menu. Researchers at Duke University have found that some consumers are more likely to choose the least healthy meal item (e.g. French fries) if they see a healthy item (e.g. salad) on the menu.

Lead researcher Gavin Fitzsimons, professor of marketing and psychology at Duke University, and colleagues call this type of behavior “vicarious goal fulfillment.” He stated, *Because the healthy option is there, it somehow satisfies this healthy eating goal in them and then they felt liberated to sort of go crazy and choose something really, really bad for them.*”

In their research study they had 70 subjects choose food items from different menus. When asked to select from a sandwich menu, they found that 37 percent of subjects chose the least healthy sandwich (bacon-cheeseburger) if there was a healthy sandwich listed (veggie burger). If the veggie burger was omitted from the menu, then 17 percent of subjects chose the bacon-cheeseburger.

Fitzsimons feels that most people should avoid fast food restaurants if they want to eat healthy since the healthy foods listed may cause them to choose the least healthiest item on the menu. He recommended that schools remove all unhealthy choices from cafeteria menus rather than trying to tempt kids away from pizza with a couple of vegetable selections.

Source: *Journal of Consumer Research*, April 2009,
www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/599219.

Keywords: fast food, restaurant.

A Grocery Shopping List Website

Grocery lists have gone high tech as a way for consumers to save time and money when they shop. Two sites that are popular are:

- Grocerywiz which helps create and save shopping lists, and print coupons for your purchases.
- Meijermealbox which links its shopping list to online coupons, recipes, and meal plans.

Source: <http://www.grocerywiz.com>;
<http://meijermealbox.publishpath.com>.

Keywords: grocery store, websites.

New Legislation Restricts Credit Card Practices

Ready access to credit, coupled with teaser interest rates, generous reward programs, grace periods and the absence of annual fees enticed many Americans to rely on credit cards for even the smallest purchases. Approximately 90 million households in the US use credit cards. Americans owed more than \$945 billion in credit card debt in March 2009. The amount has fallen during the current recession but credit card indebtedness is still about 25 percent higher than a decade ago.

Credit card companies profited from the indebtedness by hiking interest rates with little warning and slapping on snowballing penalties. As a result, consumer groups fought for change. On May 22 President Obama signed the Credit Card Reform Act of 2009 that curtails many of the fees and billing practices that have been so lucrative for card issuers. The law largely codifies a set of rules issued by the Federal Reserve last year and puts them into effect in February 2010, five months sooner than the Fed had planned.

Under the new bill, cardholders will now get a 45-day notice before their interest rate, fees, or finance charges are increased. The new law will also help consumers carrying card balances as long as they don't fall behind on payments by more than 60 days. After 60 days, penalty rates can be assessed on existing balances. If a delinquent consumer pays on time for the next six months, their old rate will be restored.

Among other restrictions:

- If a company uses "risk-based pricing" to raise rates on riskier borrowers, they have to use that same methodology to lower rates when appropriate.
- The Federal Reserve in coming months will determine what constitutes "reasonable and proportional" penalty fees. This might include a cap on the dollar amount card issuers could charge for penalties such as late fees.



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- Card issuers can charge a fee for over-the-phone payments only if you speak with a live operator. Charges will no longer be allowed for automated phone or online payments.
- Over-the-limit fees are prohibited, unless you opt in for the ability to exceed your credit limit, which can trigger a fee as high as \$40. Issuers will also be limited to charging three over-the-limit charges for a single infraction. So if your balance goes over the limit and you fail to make any payments, you could only be charged over-the-limit fees for three payment periods; right now, issuers can continue charging that fee indefinitely on unpaid balances.
- Those 21 and under will need to show they have an independent source of income to get a credit card. Otherwise, they will need a co-signer.
- If you make a payment over the minimum balance, banks will have to apply it to the highest-interest debt first. Currently banks can charge different interest rates to debt on a single card—one for a cash advance, another for a balance transfer and a third for new purchases.

In addition:

- You might be getting your bills sooner; companies need to send statements at least 21 days before payments are due under the new bill.
- Payments received by 5 pm on the due date, are on time. No more early morning deadlines, which led to late fees for payments that arrived with the afternoon mail. Also, no more late fees if the due date is a Sunday or holiday and your payment doesn't arrive until a day later.
- Card holders will also be able to clearly see how much it's costing them to borrow. For instance, monthly bills will come with little boxes stating how much they've paid in interest and in fees year-to-date.
- Statements will also spell out how long it will take to pay off a balance if only a minimum payment is made. And companies will need to include a toll-free number where the cardholder can get information about credit counseling and debt management.
- Gift cards will not expire for the first five years. There will be no more declining values and hidden fees on cards not used within a reasonable amount of time.

Note to educators: The *Washington Post* website includes a helpful summary of the new legislation with graphics. You might choose to adapt this if teaching about credit.

Sources: Kay, L., May 24, 2009. Credit Changes on the Horizon, *The Baltimore Sun*. Retrieved 5/27/08 from http://www.baltimoresun.com/business/bal-te.bz.newcreditcards24may24_0,7096640.story; Poirer, J., May 22, 2009. Update 2 - Obama signs sweeping credit card reform bill. *Reuters News Service*. Trejos, N., May 24, 2009. Change is Coming to Your Wallet, *Washington Post*. Retrieved 5/28/09 from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/graphic/2009/05/26/GR2009052600983.html?wpisrc=newsletter&wpisrc=newsletter>; Choi, C., May 20, 2009. Meltdown 101: How new credit card rules affect you. *The Associated Press*. Retrieved 5/28/09 from <http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5hbDWOG41Oyzi6RHP9vtbM0xp6FOgD98A7A280>.

Keywords: credit cards, credit.



Protect Yourself Before New Credit Law Goes into Effect

Consumer representatives warn that banks will raise interest rates and fees before the Credit Card Reform Act takes effect in February 2010. A representative of the Consumers Union said that has already happened. Card issuers started changing rates and penalties after December 2009, when the Federal Reserve Board announced new rules limiting many of the practices outlawed by the new law. "One might argue that if they were doing it until this point, they might continue to," according to Consumer's Union. Consumers will have to be vigilant to protect themselves before the legislation takes effect nine months from now.

If you do anything to show that you're a greater credit risk, banks will likely raise your APR and/or decrease your credit limit, the very next month. The same thing will happen if you are late on a payment or exceed your credit limit.

It's very important for consumer to do everything they can to maintain their credit worthiness—pay bills on time, and pay more than the minimum. Also, maintain balances well below your credit limit. A benchmark is to use no more than a third to half of your limit to maintain a good ratio of credit to debt.

Note to educators: See *Credit Card Terms Are Changing*, page 12 of the May 2009 issue of *The Communicator*. This information is especially relevant until the new credit card law takes effect next year.

Source: Kay, L., May 24, 2009. Credit Changes on the Horizon, *The Baltimore Sun*. Retrieved 5/27/08 from http://www.baltimoresun.com/business/bal-te.bz.newcreditcards24may24_0,7096640.story.

Keywords: credit cards, credit.



The American Dream Is Being Revised

Have American behaviors and values shifted in the past year as a result of the recession? The third annual Met Life Study of the American Dream set out to determine American attitudes and perceptions in light of our current economic situation and the ongoing erosion of traditional corporate and social safety nets. The study surveyed a cross-section of U.S. adults, in all generations and ethnic groups, to find out how lives have changed—and how the American dream itself has changed—in the past year. The results show an American dream that has been revised, not reversed. Americans are resetting their priorities, and the dream is now buoyed by pragmatism rather than consumerism.

An inaugural MetLife study conducted in November 2006 revealed that there was an insatiable hunger for—and a persistent pressure to buy—more and better material possessions. The bar for “basic necessities” was continually rising. But this year, for the first time, there is evidence that the bar is holding steady. Nearly half (47%) of all consumers—and 66 percent of those born before 1946—say they already have all the possessions they need, up from 34 percent reported in the first study. Four in ten Americans are even feeling “buyers’ remorse” about past purchases—wishing they had

spent less and saved more over the years. Freed from pressures today to “keep up with the Joneses,” some Americans may have seen the economic crisis as “permission” to change their behavior. Today, for many Americans, keeping up with the Joneses has been replaced broadly by an acutely felt need to keep up with the mortgage payment, the car loan, and credit card payments.

In response to economic conditions—and in light of the dream’s shifting definition and greatly reduced consumerism—Americans report that they are eating at home more often, shopping more at big box discount stores, spending less on movies and moving away from brand-name products to generics. While some of these adjustments may be short-lived, others may have lasting effects, signaling a long-term change in both consumption and the dream.

On a personal level, roughly two-thirds of Americans surveyed for the study feel more stress about their own financial situation than they did one year ago. Now, 55 percent believe their finances are heading in the right direction, down from 61 percent in November 2006. Unlike previous downturns, no one—no social, political, generational, economic or racial group—is immune. While some differences in concern exist among generational cohorts, ethnic groups and income levels, what is most notable about the current financial crisis is its scale and scope. Even the mass affluent (defined in this study as those making \$100,000+ in income per year) are feeling the squeeze. More than half of mass affluent Americans are worried about losing their job over the next 12 months—and 53 percent say they are concerned about having to file for bankruptcy in the event of a job loss.

Despite consumer behavioral and attitudinal shifts, Americans remain precariously close to the financial edge. With the erosion of public safety nets, tightening credit and declining home values, more than half (56%) are concerned about losing their job in the next year as a result of the current economic situation. For many Americans, a job loss could have dire consequences since they have little financial cushioning to survive a job loss. A startling 50 percent of Americans surveyed say they could only meet their financial obligations for one month if they were to lose their job, and the majority believe

they are already working as hard or harder than ever just to get by.

With concern about job loss affecting the masses, Americans are putting a high premium on protection and stability—signaling a major change in the way that Americans think about creating and protecting their financial future. Across generations, 81 percent say having a personal safety net will be more important this year than last. They believe that a safety net should include a mix of protection and savings products. Those who report that they have a safety net say that it includes not only cash on hand, but also products such as health and life insurance, auto and homeowners' insurance, and retirement savings. But for the majority without a safety net, nearly two-thirds say they first need to build up a cash reserve. They are also craving stable investments and savings products with predictable returns. Eight in ten Americans say they are now more concerned with guarantees and stability than they are with returns.

Source: *MetLife*, March 2009, The 2009 MetLife Study of the American Dream. Retrieved 5/27/09 from http://www.metlife.com/assets/cao/gbms/studies/09010229_09AmDreamStudy_WEB.pdf.

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Family Economics Resources

Federal Citizen Information Center. Since 1970, the Federal Citizen Information Center (**FCIC**) has been a trusted federal source for answers to questions about consumer problems and government services. Consumers can get information they need in three ways: by calling toll-free 1 (800) FED-INFO; through printed publications available from Pueblo, CO; or through information posted on the FCIC family of websites: USA.gov, Pueblo.gsa.gov, Kids.gov, ConsumerAction.gov, GobiernoUSA.gov, and Consumidor.gov.

New Consumer Action Handbook: The 2009 edition of the *Consumer Action Handbook* is one of the most helpful and popular consumer resources. This 177-page guide is designed to help citizens find the best and most direct source for assistance with

their consumer problems and questions. The handbook offers tips on topics such as what to ask before you invest, protecting against online fraud and educating yourself on how to avoid home foreclosure. It also includes a sample complaint letter that consumers can use as a guide for their own letter, fax or email. The handbook has thousands of names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses for Better Business Bureaus, corporate consumer contacts and state, county, and city government consumer protection offices. The 2008 handbook was distributed to half a million households across the country and military bases around the world. Consumers can access it online at www.consumeraction.gov. A Spanish language version is also available at www.consumidor.gov.

Family Economics Calendar

June and August. The NEFE High School Financial Planning Teacher Training. Learn how to teach personal finance to high school age members of your youth group or in your high school classes. Free! Each workshop will be held from 8:30 am-3:00 pm with lunch and snacks provided. Participants will receive a free copy of the curriculum, learn how to use the HSFPP, and network with other teachers. One UI FCS in-service credit will be available for \$86 (assignment required). Pre-registration required. For information, contact Lyle Hansen, 208-324-7578, lhansen@uidaho.edu or me.

June 9, Meridian. Capital Educators Federal Credit Union, 275 S. Stratford Dr. June 11, Lewiston. Lewis Clark Credit Union, 626 17th St.

June 18, Pocatello. Idaho State University (held in conjunction with the Professional/Technical Education Conference). Student Union Bldg., Salmon River Suites.

August, Boise or Meridian. Date and location will be announced IF there is sufficient interest. In-service credit for this session *not* available.