

Quality and Safety

Gamini Gunasekera
Chairman, Ceylon Safety Council.

Due to increasing consumer demands for reliability in products, successful manufacturers ensure that every aspect of quality and safety are satisfied by their products. This is very true of the more developed nations. Heavy competition has made them produce better quality goods with built-in safety precautions. In the developing countries, however, a certain standard of quality is often maintained but less attention is paid to the safety aspects of the processes of production which should be incorporated into the products themselves.

Quality and safety are both essential to produce a standard product so that the consumer would receive a reliable product for the price he pays. Though both these factors are essential and interrelated, it is possible to have a good quality product without any built-in safety precautions in it. But it is not possible to have safety precautions in a product of no quality. The quality of a product is not so much of its properties only, but it is also determined by the extent to which it is adapted or attuned to its use. In general usage the word 'quality' is used to designate the attractiveness or excellence of a product. Safety in a product means those precautions which have been taken to ensure that the user of the product is protected from possible injuries and hazards. Raw materials of the best quality and proper type often contribute to built-in safety precautions. Apart from the components used to

enforce safety standards in a product, special appliances may have to be added on to a product to make it safer to use. Therefore, safety in products covers the necessity of the best raw-material as well as special designs and built-in mechanisms.

In developed countries, where a choice of many similar products is available and where living standards are high, people tend to choose a better quality product if the price is not prohibitive. One would not choose a product at 50% less in price than a better quality product, if it cannot be used at least 50% longer than the more expensive product.

Today, the consumer is becoming more and more quality conscious. Not only the price but also the quality and reliability of a product is a decisive factor in successful marketing. The producer's interest lies in producing an article at relatively low cost that enables a large profit margin. The consumers' interest lies in readily available low priced products which have lasting quality and looks good. To integrate both interests quality control has to be directed to production. The consumer is not interested in the safety aspects of a product if it is not important in usage. For instance, there are no safety aspects which the consumer looks for when purchasing wearing apparel. On the contrary, the consumer interested in safety in a product will first

look into its safety aspects and quality later. For example, if he buys a safety harness to work on an electric post he would look into the built-in safety precaution in the product. An importer of local prawns would look into the safety standards aspects of production and packing as they would cause health hazards. A wearer of a motorcycle crash helmet would not purchase one made out of aluminium but would look for a safety standard tested product of fibre glass. Where safety is involved, quality is automatically present because the manufacturer could not enforce the safety standard in his products without the quality standard in both raw-materials and the finished product.

Quality being of a relative nature, does not exist in itself like safety. Quality is always connected with the purpose for which it is used. The product can be of excellent quality in regard to one purpose but of good quality with regard to a different purpose. When comparing a Statesmen Holden to a Mini-minor car our judgement is influenced by the criteria we apply with a view to the purpose we have in mind or by appreciation of specific properties. A large expensive quality car will not serve the purpose of shopping in a crowded area but it will suit the purpose of being chauffeur-driven to a state function. Therefore, quality has relationship directly to usage. Road safety-conscious motorists would purchase a car with as many

possible built-in safety precautions, such as collapsible steering columns, good road holding qualities, head-rests for front seats, safety wind-screens and a sturdy body to prevent injuries from roll overs.

It was once said that a product may be of good quality without any safety in it. Many cars are manufactured today of very good quality without additional safety precautions. Safety standards in the manufacture of motor vehicles are being strictly enforced during the past few years in all manufacturing plants. Under competition some manufacturers produce better and more attractive built-in motoring safety precautions than others, to promote their sales.

Quality and safety are inter-related and are both essential in the making of a good product. Quality and standards, too, go together. The enforcement of standards laid down by the Bureau of Ceylon Standards cover quality control. The Bureau of Ceylon Standards has taken steps, recently, to enforce quality products in the match manufacturing trade and in prawns and asbestos industries. Safety standards are also being imposed and enforced by the Bureau of Standards. The enforcement of these standards in quality and safety are very welcome in elevating the manufacturing standards in Sri Lanka which is now entering the export market in many new fields of manufacture.