

Problem Packaging

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February 7, 2006

So how many scars do you have from opening up those hard plastic shells that seem to surround almost everything we buy these days, whether it's toothbrushes, electronic gear or toys? I've got quite a few. I've also had my share of messes when I've tried to open some of those cereal and chips bags as well.

Well, the latest issue of Consumer Reports is handing out "Oyster Awards" for America's hardest-to open packages. (Consumer Reports requires payment to read this.) The winner is the hard-plastic clamshell around Uniden's digital cordless phone set. It took 9 minutes, 22 seconds to open the set, which has 14 pieces, with rivets between each. The phone package wasn't the longest to open, but it was the most dangerous because the edges were so sharp.

The package that took the longest to open (and won second place) was American Idol Barbie, which took 15 minutes, 10 seconds to get loose thanks to the twisting wires, snapping rubber bands, stripping tape, etc. "Most of the job had to be done carefully by hand, with help from a single-edge razor blade." Scary thought for a kid's toy!

The magazine also singles out disc and game packaging, pills in blister packs and cereal boxes for its oyster dishonors. It does provide some hope on better alternatives, including the coffee can; many now come with peel-back foil lids, no longer creating a dangerous sharp edge that comes with a can opener.

Got any packaging tales--good or bad? If so, let me know at thecheckout@washpost.com

P.S. A couple of my colleagues have just forwarded their suggestions about how to open those pesky clamshells. One swears by poultry shears, saying they can cut anything, even excess carpeting. And when they fail, the other colleague says he turns to tin snips--strong enough to cut sheet metal, let alone inflexible plastic.