

Harvard Business Review Takes Aim at Prop. 65 Warnings

WARNINGS

By LANA BECKETT, January 13, 2017

David Lazarus' column in the Los Angeles Times **reported**¹⁾ on a **recently published paper**²⁾ in the Harvard Business Review that concluded that the U.S. warning-label system "fails miserably at distinguishing between large and small risks."

The Harvard Business Review said consumers should think about the difference between wolves (potentially very dangerous) and puppies (not so much).

"The problem with our present warning system is that it shouts 'Danger!' for both wolves and puppies," the authors wrote. "Such a system is of little value, people quickly learn to ignore warnings since they encounter vastly more puppies than wolves. The result is that when a wolf is truly present, people pay little heed."

The article mentioned Proposition 65 as an example of warnings that do not convey enough information. He wrote "that message might be diluted in many consumers' eyes by, say, language required by California's Proposition 65, the Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986. It requires state businesses to post signs warning of the presence of chemicals known to cause cancer or birth defects. However, because the law covers more than 800 chemicals, such signs can be ubiquitous in a consumer's daily travels. This, the researchers said, is a classic example of a warning-label puppy — yes, you could get bit, but it's highly unclear if there's actually any danger."

Resources for this article

1. reported

<http://www.latimes.com/business/lazarus/la-fi-lazarus-warning-labels-20161206-story.html>

2. recently published paper

<https://hbr.org/2016/11/consumer-warning-labels-arent-working>