

Gas Association, and others. Advertising, whose avowed reason for being is to inform consumers about a product or service, fulfills this mission only occasionally, but rarely in a useful way for the consumer.

And the word of mouth sharing of experience, though sometimes extremely effective, also often falls into the "old wives' tale" category, and so a concerned consumer can never really know when to believe it and when not to.

In sum, it seems clear that the gap between the demand for information and the supply of it is large. Every day a new magazine joins the ranks of product information disseminators. Legislators say their mail on consumer problems is heavy and increased Government concern—manifested among other ways in hearings like this—is evident.

Many suggestions have been offered, both long term and short, for reducing the consumer's areas of ignorance about the products he buys.

And this brings me to the heart of today's inquiry.

Many Government agencies have in their files, as a spin-off from their normal day-to-day activities, a great deal of information that would be directly useful to consumers. It is my belief that a systematic review of the activities of Government agencies for purposes of learning which of them develop information on consumer products by type and/or brand name would reveal a mine of such information which, when tapped, would prove of inestimable value in helping the consumer improve his buying effectiveness. My belief is based on the tip of this iceberg we can see even now from a cursory survey of this kind that has already been done. In Senate Report 2216, "Price of Hearing Aids—Report of the Committee on the Judiciary, 1962," appendix A contains a summary of precedents for Government product testing and publication of comparative and/or evaluatory data on various brands of a product. A portion of this material is submitted as an appendix to my testimony for your ready reference.

I won't take the time to read it here. You will note references to tests and evaluations done by one or another agency of the Federal Government on such important consumer products as hearing aids, batteries, tires, floor waxes, lamps, various building materials, washing machines, detergents, home freezers, and others. The Senate study makes clear that these are only examples. The shortness of notice of this hearing today has not allowed me to search the files at Consumers Union for additional examples they may contain. From memory, however, subject to check of detail, I can add that the Bureau of Fisheries of the U.S. Department of Agriculture does tests on frozen fish products in consumer packages, at the behest of the producer and keeps the information for the use of the producer but does not make it available to consumers even when asked to do so by Consumers Union, and that the U.S. Department of Agriculture has information on the effectiveness and toxicity of insecticides, that the Federal Drug Administration tests such important consumer products as clinical thermometers and condoms, that the laboratories of the quartermaster evaluate many consumer items of clothing and textiles, the Navy laboratories used to evaluate paints, detergents, and other consumer products and the General Services Administration and/or the National Bureau of Standards test many consumer products including tires, seat belts, brake fluids (seat belts and brake fluids have been transferred to the new Department of Transportation and I have no idea what they will do about that) auto antifreezes, batteries, and others.