

Consumer News & Views

Published twice monthly

April 1, 2014



In this Issue...

- **Consumer Confidence Climbs in March**
- **GM Scrambles to Find Loaner Cars for Recall Customers.**
- **Fewer Hospital Patients Risk Infections during Stays.**
- **ACC Board Candidates Deadline is April 4th.**
- **Transamerica Serves the Insurance Needs of America's Consumers.**
- **ACC Annual Business Meeting is June 13.**
- **Apply for the 2013 Green CSM Certification Program.**

Consumer Confidence Climbs in March. The Conference Board's Consumer Confidence Index®, which had decreased in February, improved in March. The Index now stands at 82.3 (1985=100), up from 78.3 in February.

Lynn Franco, Director of Economic Indicators at The Conference Board stated, "Consumer confidence improved in March as expectations for the short-term outlook bounced back from February's decline. While consumers were moderately more upbeat about future job prospects and the overall economy, they were less optimistic about income growth. Overall, consumers expect the economy to continue improving and believe it may even pick up a little steam in the months ahead."

Thomas Hinton, president of the American Consumer Council, told an audience in Chicago this week, "We are a long ways from a full recovery despite the mood on Wall Street. Too many consumers are living paycheck to paycheck. Regrettably, Congress has done little or nothing to really stabilize the economy. Most of this recovery since 2012 can be directly attributed to consumers reducing their spending and the loan support of community banks and credit unions helping small businesses get through these tough times."

GM Scrambles to Find Loaner Cars for Recall Customers. General Motors (GM) is scrambling to fill the requests of more than 9,000 consumers seeking loaner cars who have been affected by their massive recall of vehicles with faulty ignition switches. GM dealers have rented out all their loaner cars and are now relying on Enterprise and other car rental companies to fill the flood of requests.

Chris Woodyard, of *USA Today* reports that such are the rough edges of General Motors' recall of 1.62 million cars worldwide that need new ignition switches installed to prevent the kinds of accidents blamed for 12 deaths. The switches can jostle out of the "run" position into "accessory," shutting off the engine and killing power to the air bags and other safety systems.



GM's CEO Mary Barra has told dealers to give any owner of a recalled model a free loaner vehicle if requested. Owners don't have to prove their switches are faulty or that they've been in accidents to qualify, GM says.

In a rare move, GM even told dealers they can break the rule of using only GM rental cars, if need be, to supply all owners. It also said it is making special arrangements for college-age customers who might otherwise have trouble renting, and has enlisted multiple rental car agencies for the loaners.

GM has created a dedicated hotline for recall questions and has added staffing and is providing training, hoping to prevent long waits for callers — and wrong answers, which some customers initially got when they called.

GM says dealers should have the first batch of new switches April 7 to begin recall repairs — but that will be just 60,000 of them. Barra told reporters that the company has an October goal for completing the job.

"It's a mixed bag," says Aaron Jacoby, who specializes in dealer issues as head of the automotive practice of Arent Fox, a law firm. "It's not that dealers are entirely unhappy there is a GM recall," he says, because it's a chance to woo new patrons when they bring in their cars for recall repairs, and they will make money doing the recall work. But they also don't want disappointed customers whose expectations exceed the reality of the recall pace.

GM and federal safety officials both emphasize that owners should detach the ignition key from their key rings and use the key by itself. Heavy key rings make it easier for the ignition switch to malfunction.

Most of the recalled vehicles — 1.37 million — are in the U.S. They are:

- 2005-07 Chevrolet Cobalt
- 2007 Pontiac G5
- 2003-07 Saturn Ion
- 2006-07 Chevrolet HHR
- 2006-07 Pontiac Solstice
- 2007 Saturn Sky.

Hotline numbers for GM car owners to call for recall information are:

- Chevrolet: 800-222-1020
- Pontiac: 800-762-2737
- Saturn: 800-553-6000

Hospital Patients Still Risk Infections During Stay. Although hospitals are doing a better job of controlling the risk of infections during a patient's stay, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that one in 25 patients in U.S. hospitals has an infection acquired as part of his or her care. The number of infections appear to be dropping as a result of major efforts by hospitals to control potentially deadly pathogens inside medical facilities.

The CDC's 2011 survey of 183 hospitals showed that an estimated 648,000 patients nationwide suffered 721,000 infections, and 75,000 of them died — though it is impossible to tell from the data how many deaths were directly attributable to the acquired infection, said Michael Bell, deputy director of CDC's division of health care quality promotion. Nevertheless, "today and every day, more than 200 Americans with healthcare-associated infections will die during their hospital stay," CDC Director Tom Frieden said.



Clostridium difficile. (Courtesy of CDC)

The most common infections are pneumonia (22 percent), surgical site infections (22 percent), gastrointestinal infections (17 percent), urinary tract infections (13 percent), and bloodstream infections (10 percent), the agency reported in the study, published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

When coupled with the growing risks posed by antibiotic resistant bacteria, the prevalence of hospital-acquired infections remains a serious problem for care-givers, one that the CDC is continuing to battle on a state-by-state and even hospital-by-hospital basis.

Atop the list of pathogens acquired in hospitals is the bacterium *clostridium difficile* (commonly known as c. diff), which can cause gastroenterological illnesses so severe that removal of a patient's colon is sometimes required. It was responsible for 12.1 percent of the infections turned up by the survey. Also common was methicillin-resistant *staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), a staph infection that has become resistant to common antibiotics.

Such infections — rather than ones associated with devices such as central catheters, urinary catheters and ventilators, comprised the majority of the health-care-related infections revealed by the survey. According to the CDC, the rate of infections from “central lines” that are placed into patients' major blood vessels has been cut nearly in half since 2008, and the infection rate after surgery has declined by 20 percent in the same time.

But urinary tract infections, which are not as dangerous, remain persistent. About 34 million people were admitted to U.S. acute care hospitals in 2012, according to the study, which did not look at other in-patient settings such as nursing homes. The infection rate declined when compared with the results tallied by the CDC in 2007, but those were based on historical data rather than a survey.

Patients can also take steps to protect themselves, the experts say. For example, patients and families can ask health workers to wash hands, ask when catheters and other tubes can be removed and ask whether any antibiotics prescribed are truly needed and appropriate. Asking such questions is not easy for many people, CDC's Bell says. “It's hard to do, but it's very important that people try.”

Patients and families also can check on the infection control records of their hospitals at Hospital Compare, a site maintained by Medicare.

Victoria Nahum, executive director of the Safe Care Campaign, urged hospital patients to insist on “compulsive hand hygiene” and other best practices by their care-givers, including physicians, and visitors. That may mean patients will have to overcome the fear of questioning doctors about their hygiene while hospitalized, or have a relative or friend do it for them. Below is a chart from the CDC that offers ways that patients and their family members can reduce the risk of infection during hospital stays.



American Consumer Council Invites Members to Serve on Board of Directors. Two members of the American Consumer Council (ACC) have submitted applications to stand for election to the Board of Directors. The qualified individuals are Barbara Yager, an attorney in Madison, Connecticut, and Edward McHale, an attorney in West Palm Beach, Florida. Candidates for the ACC Board of Directors must complete a written document stating their qualifications and intentions to serve on the Board. The document must be submitted to ACC's national headquarters by April 4th and witnessed by a second member of the organization.

ACC's Secretary will post a ballot on April 14 for all members to complete no later Friday, May 9th. The two top vote recipients will be seated as new directors at the 2014 annual meeting to be held on Friday, June 13, in San Diego. Service as an ACC board member is a voluntary position and elected directors are not compensated for their service. Officers and employees of credit unions and regulatory agency officials and their agents are not eligible for service in keeping with ACC's policies relating to conflicts-of-interest.

The email address for all responses is: info@americanconsumercouncil.org



ACC also is seeking additional member representation for its eight standing committees – Education; Sponsorship; Advocacy & Consumerism; Member Services; Regional & State Councils; Marketing; Regulatory & Government Affairs; and, Awards & Recognition.

Any member who wishes to serve on one of ACC's eight standing committees may do so by sending a statement describing their interest and qualifications. Appointments are announced on a regular basis. Officers of credit unions and regulatory officials and their agents are not eligible for service in keeping with ACC's policies relating to conflicts-of-interest.



Transamerica Financial Solutions Group serves the financial institution market with loan protection products, reinsurance solutions and related services. Our mission is to market the industry's most innovative insurance programs and deliver effective marketing, professional training and support to help our partners maximize profitability while reducing costs and improving service.

Transamerica is an AEGON company, a multinational insurance organization headquartered in The Hague, the Netherlands. AEGON is one of the world's leading life insurance and financial services organizations. Transamerica markets the quality products of AEGON's affiliated insurance carriers and utilizes the resources and expertise gained from diverse products and distribution channels. With a portfolio that includes credit and mortgage insurance, debt cancellation, reinsurance solutions and related products, Transamerica can tailor products that strengthen your financial institution while protecting customers' loan obligations.

Transamerica utilizes the following AEGON company carriers that are rated by A.M. Best Company, Standard & Poor's, Fitch Ratings and Moody's Investor Service based on financial strength and operating performance.

Transamerica has an outstanding track record of supporting credit unions and other financial institutions. Transamerica is also a corporate sponsor of the American Consumer Council.

For more information, please contact Transamerica Vice President Tom Kazar at:
http://www.transamericafinancialsolutions.com/contact_us.html



ACC Annual Meeting Scheduled for Friday, June 13. The annual meeting of the American Consumer Council will be held in San Diego, California on Friday, June 21, 2013 at 10:00 am PST. The specific meeting location will

be announced soon. This year's meeting will include a teleconference call to accommodate more members who wish to participate. All voting members are invited to participate in the annual business meeting. There is no cost to attend the meeting.

To register to participate at this year's annual meeting, please email the ACC office. If you wish to participate via the teleconference, please request the password for access to the conference call at: info@americanconsumercouncil.org.

The annual meeting will discuss business matters pertinent to the management and operations of the American Consumer Council including the election of two new directors for the board of directors, and review activities and issues during the past 12 months. An agenda will be posted on the ACC website by May 1st.

Green CSM Certification Accepting Applications for 2014 Summer Cycle:

If your company or organization would like to increase its credibility with consumers, you should consider applying for the **Green CSM Certification**. Applications for the 2014 Summer cycle are now being accepted through May 30, 2014.

It's a proven fact that consumers want to do business with companies that are eco-friendly and practice Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The process is straight-forward and all applicants are recognized by ACC and the Green USA Institute.

All applicants complete the criteria and submit their responses to ACC's Green Consumer Council for review, assessment and feedback. Program details and the **Green CSM Certification** criteria can be viewed at ACC's website located at: <http://americanconsumercouncil.org/greenc.asp>

