Urban Legends and Myths

What Are Urban Legends?

- Great story often retold = urban folklore Funny, sad, horrifying but instructive
- Too good to be True!
 - Either a true story *embellished* or a complete fabrication with a "moral"
- Often happened to a friend of a friend "Now this story <u>really</u> happened"

Are Urban Legends True?

- Some basis in truth
- Most stories are retold with new variations usually never happened
- Spread by word-of-mouth, e-mail and the Internet
- Repeated by newspapers, media stories,
- Versions can be traced historically
- Tell-tale warning signs can vary

Signs it's an Email Hoax

Courtesy of hoaxbusters.ciac.org

- Dire advice and warning!!! "send this to everyone you know"
- Story is very plausible
- Source is an expert and should know
- Letters always have recognizable parts:A Hook A Threat A Request
- Solution when in doubt don't send it out
 Validate stories thru Urban Legend websites

Why do Legends spread?

- Great stories you want to share
- Sounds believable
- Most people assume the truth
- Most people want to help
- We have lots of people we can send email to very quickly

A Few Favorite Legends

- Microwaved water can explode
- Worker died after "Lead Running"
- Man found dead (5 days) in office
- Cults hid AIDS-infected needles in vending machines
- Exploding toilets (butts meet flammables)
- Cell phones cause explosions at gas stations
- A hospital cleaner polishes off patients
- Microwave radiation "cooks" worker

Exploding Water

Center for Devices and Radiological Health

Risk of Burns from Eruptions of Hot Water Overheated in Microwave Ovens



The FDA has received reports of serious skin burns or scalding water erupting out of a cup after it had been over-heated in a m superheated water (past its boiling temperature) without appear

This type of phenomena occurs if water is heated in a clean cup. added before heating, the risk is greatly reduced. If superheat picking up the cup, or pouring in a spoon full of instant coffee, rexploding out of the cup.

From the Mailbag...

Can Microwaved Water Explode?

Dateline: 01/19/00

Dear Guide:

I received this email that had been forwarded by many companies' safety departments. Apparently, there is actual science fact behind this, but the email is worded

Lead "Running"

I can offer you a smattering of a story about 'lead running'. This appearently was a 'russian roulette' game for bored lead smelters. The lead was melted in large open topped vats, and unless constantly stirred it would skim over. The bored workers would allow this to happen and then with the aid of a couple of wooden planks arranged as a up and down ramp, they would run up one ramp, across the surface of the skimmed over lead, and down the other plank.

This apparently had something to do with bravado, manliness or even acceptance within the group.

Of course things did not always go well, and some of the workers received serious burns. The story goes that one young man, not very experienced, decided to try this, when the surface was really not well skimmed over at all. As he hit the surface it broke immediately and he fell through the surface up to his neck in melted lead. He screamed pitifully in agony. An older worker immediately picked up one of the pieces of wood, and forced the desparate worker under the surface of the lead, to put him out of his misery. The older worker who did this, of course, the young mans father.

Personal e-mail from an HS-Canada subscriber

George Turklebaum, R.I.P.

As the story goes, the 51-year-old Turklebaum suffered a fatal coronary one day while working at his desk. Apparently none of his 23 coworkers thought it remarkable to see him slumped motionless in his chair for five days running, because Turklebaum kept mostly to himself and was always the first to arrive and the last to leave the office every day.

"Of course the story is true," the *Mercury* said when questioned about its veracity. Nevermind the New York

Among the colorful bits added in the *Mercury's* this tag: "Ironically, George was proofreading r medical textbooks when he died."

City white pages don't list a single Turklebaum anywhere in the area, the item came from a reliable source — a Big Apple radio station.

http://urbanlegends.about.com/science/urbanlegends/

Needles That Stick

Vending Machines of Death!

From the Mailbag

Dateline: 01/03/01

Dear Guide:

I got this email, and it has local cities and towns listed. Is this a copy of a hoax? Do you have any way of determining if it's true? The one reason why I think this is probably not true is that Cokes cost at least a loonie (one Canadian dollar) in vending machines. The letter su is given in change.

More of this Feature

• <u>Part 2: Return of the</u> Needle Men

Related Articles

***This is not some scary fiction story!
THIS IS NOW HAPPENING IN ALBERTA!!!...

Please read on and then pass this warning to people you care about. At our student council meeting this afternoon, our advisor (a teacher at the school) told us that last week, she received a phone call from a friend at the University of Lethbridge. THE ABOVE SCENARIO HAPPENED THERE RECENTLY at the U of L) !!! How many it happened to or why not many have heard about it is beyond me, but THIS IS REALLY HAPPENING!!!!!!!!! Police suspect that this is the work of a particular cult in western Canada. It

Needle Stories

- Vary in locale "Cult" putting needles in either theatre seats, gasoline pumps, vending machines, pay phones (regional variations)
- Evolution and mixing of U.Ls AIDS Mary and Stick Men
- CDC issues an advisory about hoax
- Some copy-cats have put needles into "sneaky" places but not AIDS-infected...

http://www.urbanlegends.com/ulz/needles.html

Exploding Toilets

- Famous story with many variations
- Flammable finds its way into toilet
- Person uses toilet, smokes
- Dropped "butt" ignites, creating injury

Variations include:

Gasoline, cleaning fluid, insecticide, hair spray, coconut oil Currently still researching accounts from some contributors...

Cell Phones That Go BOOM

Pumped Up Urban Myth

USA Today recently carried the explosive news that BP Amoco and Chevron were banning cell phones from being used near pumps at their gas stations ("Cell phones banned at gas pump," Oct. 8).

This followed similar bans in Canada earlier in the year. Unfo Warning: Cell phone use in gas stations imagined risk rather than an actual one.

The rationale behind the bans is that cell phones might cause. In case, you do not know, there was an pump and so cause a massive explosion. But The San Fran concern before the American companies imposed their ban. Spurs Warnings From Fuel Industry" (Aug. 28), the Chroni ban to an urban legend that such a thing had actually happen record of such an incident. A similar reaction to an urban leg Southeast Asia; since 1993, the South China Morning Pos Post have all run articles warning about the "hazard" and ref there is no record of such an incident actually happening.

While a mobile phone could theoretically cause a spark, wl is very difficult to measure the risk involved, because no sucl of it happening are as close to zero as you can get. As the C to it, the reasons for the ban vanish in a puff of smoke.

Cell Phones....

incident where a driver suffered burns and his car severely damaged when gasoline fumes ignited an explosion while he was talking on his mobile phone standing near the attendant who was pumping the gas. All the electronic devices in gas stations are protected with explosive containment devices,

(intrinsically safe) while cell phones are not. READ YOUR HANDBOOK! Mobile phone makers Motorola, Ericsson, and Nokia, all print cautions in their user handbooks that warn against mobile phones in "gas stations, fuel storage sites, and chemical factories." Exxon has begun placing "warning stickers" at its gasoline stations. The threat mobile phones pose to gas stations and their users is primarily the result of their ability to produce sparks that can be generated by the

Cell Phones

- Phone manufacturers and gasoline companies have issued warnings in the past
- BUT no verifiable incident can be traced (beyond 2 newspaper reports which turned out to be false)

... it hasn't happened yet but ...

The Hospital Cleaner

- Newspaper Title: Cleaner Polishes Off Patient
- Series of dead patients in ICU same bed every Friday morning
- Search for cause but no clues
- Finally find out that every Friday morning a cleaner would remove a plug used for life support system, use socket to polish the floor
- "Cape Times, 6/13/96"

http://www.urbanlegends.com/medical/hospital_cleaning_lady.html

The Hospital Cleaner

- Cape Times did report story but not completely – 2 key points missed
 - Hospital official didn't know the story
 - Gov't Representative said story was unconfirmed and were "investigating"
- Phrase "investigating" was sufficient to give the story credibility and so the story was printed – though embellished from one death to several via e-mail re-tellings

Microwave "Cooking"

Legend: Worker who stands too close to microwave radiation is cooked by its rays.

Example: [Collected on the Internet, 1999]

(25 December 1998, Canada) Telephone relay company night watchman Edward Baker, 31, was killed early Christmas morning by excessive microwave radiation exposure. He was apparently attempting to keep warm next to a telecommunications feedhorn.

Baker had been suspended on a safety violation once last year, according to Northern Manatoba Signal Relay spokesperson Tanya Cooke. She noted that Baker's earlier infraction was for defeating a safety shutoff switch and entering a restricted maintenance catwalk in order to stand in front of the microwave dish. He had told coworkers that it was the only way he could stay warm during his twelve-hour shift at the station, where winter temperatures often dip to forty below zero.

http://www.snopes2.com/horrors/techno/cooked.htm

Websites on Urban Legends

- Alt.folklore.urban & Urban Legends Archives www.urbanlegends.com
- Urban Legends and Folklore urbanlegends.about.com
- * Hoaxbusters hoaxbusters.ciac.org/HBUrbanMyths.shtml
- Urban Legends Reference Pages www.snopes2.com/
- Darwin Awards Fictional or worse www.darwinawards.com

Books on Urban Legends

Jan Harold Brunvand and Other Authors

- Too Good to Be True
- The Truth Never Stands in the Way of a Good Story







