
Asian fowl pox liners. Toothbrush sanitizers. UV ray sensors. Anti-mite mattress sprays.

Domestic life in 2006 is under attack. And the housewares industry is aiming to fight back against the threat.

The American consumer today is worried about diseases, toxic chemicals, body fat and indoor air quality. Blood-sucking, weed-infested water is over stressed and would like a massage when they get home. The times they are a-changing in what we do and everywhere we go.

"It's getting scarier out there for a lot of people," said Beth Ann Guinn, senior executive editor of The Personal Goods Report, a newsletter for retailers. "People want things that will protect them from things, and health is on the minds of the most people." As a whole people are concerned about the environment and would like to avoid touching anything creapy that might spread germs.

"It's getting scarier out there for a lot of people. We've heard about anthrax and mad cow disease and all the mold contamination in the Katrina states," said Lisa Casely West, lifestyle consultant for the International Housewares Association, which held its annual trade show here March 12-14 for 21,000 exhibitors and 36,000 attendees. "The home is where people use to feel protected from those outside influences. Now, we are grasping for those products that enable us to get a better sense of self-protection."

The wave of products designed to allay consumer fears started building over the past few decades with home fire extinguishers, carbon monoxide detectors and antibacterial wipes. Today, manufacturers are trying to empower consumers to take control of their homes such as food safety, blood pressure and pet odors. Sometimes science doesn't totally support the need for or the efficiency of -- these products.

We used to be fearful of mottled munching holes in our sweaters. Now we are scared of pocket scenarios penetrating our Granny uniforms. Enter the Trendy Lotus Sanitizing System, a flashy new countertop kitchen appliance advertised as "using science to kill bugs in fruits and vegetables in its sanitizing bow."

Worried your loved ones might be exposed to bed bugs in the fog? Taylor Precision Products, a major manufacturer of thermometers and scales, has introduced Timetrip, which act as "visual alarm clocks" for food, telling consumers when it's time to lose pieces of the fridge. The clock won't ring until the time is right.

"We're getting more requests for checking the area around the house," said the Arm & Hammer Pet Fresh Odor Grabber was designed to zap Fluffy's embarrassing smells. Does rinsing make you nervous? The New Clorox Iron with the Auto Lift System by Tough jobs that shoot out when you move your moving, keeping the iron in a more stable, horizontal position.

Some makers like to throw around scary words and phrases, such as SARS and avian flu. In fact, as you walk down the packed aisles of 50,000 products at the housewares show in McCormick Place Convention Center, your gaze catches annoyingly on a rack of fliers at the M.I. Haus Co booth with the jaw-dropping headline "Asian Fowl Poultry Timers."

According to health officials, the dreaded bird flu virus has not been found in the United States. The Ohio company hoped to attract the attention of buyers in Asia and Europe, areas where pop-up chicken and turkey timers are virtually unknown and where cases of bird flu have been confirmed. In some European countries, such as France and Italy, consumption of chicken has plummeted because of fears of the deadly disease.

Steve Johnson, senior vice president of Heuck, acknowledges that he has seen no evidence from public health officials that someone could get this disease from eating infected poultry or eggs. Health experts say that cooking chicken to an internal temperature of 170-180 degrees Fahrenheit will kill any virus.

Heuck has said sales of Heuck disposable pop-up timers in the United Kingdom are soaring, from only 10,000 sold last year to well over 1 million this year. He says the safe foods sales pitch is "just to call attention to the fact that cooking to the proper temperature would kill the virus if it were in there."

Some products are coming onto the market directly from the health-care industry. At Touchless innovators Housewares & Products, they offer an alternative to constantly wiping down your kitchen or bathroom trash can with antibacterial wipes; a "smart" stainless steel trash can that pads automatically when it detects movement. According to Michael Shiek, the company's chief executive, the trash can is designed to be used in the home or office and approach and closes automatically after a few seconds. The Touchless Trashcan has been used in hospitals, nursing homes, schools and day-care centers, and is available at Target online for $39.10. Tens of thousands have bought through the Touchless Trashcan since the first model was conceived in 2004. A sleek silver docking station for four trashcans was designed by the lab Philippe Stark and uses a wireless ultrasonic belt to zap germs and bacteria.

According to Touchless president and co-founder Jonathan Pinhas, the $55 unit first catered to "germaphobes" people who had a higher sense of hygiene and cleanliness, "but as the device won design awards from Time magazine and others, it caught on, and Touchless has sold tens of thousands at retailers such asSharper Image and Amazon.com. "Sure, it does fit into the fear factor," says Pinhas, "but kere's your control: if you have your mind set on killing all the germs that do exist, and nothing else, this guy will do that for you."

As for what Pinhas calls the "gross" problem of toothbrushes that have hung out in toilets or in gym bags and are stored in dark environments that are perfect breeding grounds for germs.

What does this new world of domestic anxiety and spoon products say about us? Usebena D. Levy, a Washington psychotherapist, says the current fear factor goes back to 011, when many people experienced a loss of control. "We realized there is nothing we can do about terrorism; you can do it in one of our daily lives," she says. "It's all about people using these products as safety nets. You can keep the bedbugs out of your bed or the rodent out of our basement, it's going to make us feel better."