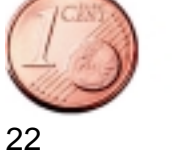




From the Taipei Times

Dermatologists say that the euro can make you sick



It has been accused of crushing national identity, pushing up prices and being the best friend of fraudsters and drug barons. But now the euro - Europe's new single currency - faces its toughest criticism: It can make you ill.

After years of anticipation, the coins and notes were launched in 12 countries on the 1st January, but millions of people who eagerly grab their new coins could see their hands turn into a scaly, diseased mass after minutes.

The *British Journal of Dermatology* has warned that the coins could cause eczma among 45 million people. Austrian doctors have branded them a "very dirty currency." City traders have called the euro, which has fallen sharply in value, a "toilet currency" because it has gone down the pan.

Bank tellers and shop assistants have been advised to wear gloves for work, or to get a new job. The 1 and 2 coins contain high levels of nickel. European bureaucrats agreed to include the metal despite warnings that allergy to nickel affects up to one in seven people, particularly women.

Medical researchers have conducted tests showing the coins can make far more people sick than currencies they replace.

But a spokesman for the European Commission said: "Nickel is used extensively in a number of national currencies already — there is no scientific evidence there will be any medical effects." But Dominic Cummings, chief executive of the 'No' Campaign, gloated: "This is one of many balls-ups in the brief history of the euro."

Coins

There are 8 euro coins denominated in 2 and 1 euros, then 50, 20, 10, 5, 2 and 1 cents. Every euro coin carries a common European face. On the reverse, each participating Member State has decorated the coins with their own motifs. No matter which motif is on the coins they can be used anywhere inside the Member States. For example, a French citizen will be able to buy a hot dog in Berlin using a euro coin carrying the imprint of the King of Spain.

The common European face of the coins represents a map of the European Union against a background of transverse lines to which are attached the stars of the European flag. The 1, 2 and 5 cent coins put emphasis on Europe's place in the world while the 10, 20 and 50 present the Union as a gathering of nations. The 1 and 2 euro coins depict Europe without frontiers. Final designs were agreed at the European Council meeting in Amsterdam in June 1997.

Notes

There are 7 euro notes. In different colours and sizes they are denominated in 500, 200, 100, 50, 20, 10 and 5 euros. The notes are uniform throughout the euro area; unlike coins, they will have no national side. The designs are symbolic for Europe's architectural heritage. They do not represent any existing monuments.

Windows and gateways dominate the front side of each banknote as symbols of the spirit of openness and cooperation in the EU. The reverse side of each banknote features a bridge from a particular age, a metaphor for communication among the people of Europe and between Europe and the rest of the world. Final designs were announced in December 1996 at the Dublin, European Council. All notes carry advanced security features. All euro notes are legal tender in all countries of the euro area.

The conversion rate for the euro for each participating currency is irrevocably fixed and is the only rate to be used for conversion either way between the euro and the national currency unit or for conversion between the national currency units.

The euro conversion rates are:

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|--------------------|----------|
| Austrian schilling | 13.7603 |
| Belgian franc | 40.3399 |
| Deutsche Mark | 1.95583 |
| Dutch guilder | 2.20371 |
| Finnish markka | 5.94573 |
| French franc | 6.55957 |
| Greek drachma | 340.750 |
| Irish pound | 0.787564 |
| Italian lira | 1936.27 |
| Luxembourg franc | 40.3399 |
| Portuguese escudo | 200.482 |
| Spanish peseta | 166.386 |