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MIND-GOGLING RESTRICTIONS

The weird and wonderful world of health and safety did its best to spoil the party once again when officials decided, in their wisdom, to ban children's goggles at a local swimming pool.

"Dozens of children had their plastic goggles confiscated when they turned up to the Aqua Splash Festival at Hermitage Leisure Centre in Whitwick, Coalville, Leics, The Daily Telegraph reported in February.

Officials say the goggles can cause children to bump into each other and the rubber straps are dangerous if a child has them "snapped back in their face".

Parents were quick to hit back, claiming their children looked like they had been "poked in each eye" after the session.

Margaret Simpkins, 40, said it was "utterly potty" that her eight-year-old son Tyler had his goggles confiscated. "Tyler always likes to swim in his goggles because he dives under water a lot," she said.

"The funny thing is that the pool even sells goggles at the front counter but bans children from wearing them. It's an utterly potty decision."

The Daily Telegraph cited a 39-year-old father-of-two, who did not want to be named: "My daughter learned to swim wearing goggles. She goes swimming with the school - and she wears goggles. She goes regularly to the Hermitage Leisure Centre - and she wears goggles. It's a laughable ruling. Surely, it was more likely to cause an accident, rather than prevent one. You could see the kids at the end of the session - they all looked like they had been lined up and poked in each eye."

The Daily Telegraph said organisers of the event imposed the ban after receiving advice from Leicestershire County Council.

"We have received guidance from the Association for Physical Education (AFPE), which advises all councils that pupils should not wear goggles in school swimming lessons."



HAPPY DAYS ARE HERE AGAIN

Britain's wartime saviour Winston Churchill frequently suffered bouts of crippling depression, which he named his black dog. So, it should come as no surprise that man's best friend can also be prone to fits of the blues. But help is at hand according to a Times story in February.

"If your dog is barking mad," The Times said, "You can give it some Prozac."

A dog version of the anti-depressant drug has been launched in America and will soon be available in Britain.

The drug, called Reconcile, comes in a beef-flavoured chewy form and is also expected to curb compulsive pacing, chewing and dribbling.

Prozac has been used to cure compulsive behaviour in humans. It works by increasing the brain's levels of serotonin, a mood-lifting chemical.

Trials involving more than 660 mentally disturbed pets in Europe and America produced improvements in behaviour within eight weeks," The Times reported.

"Animal behaviour research shows that as many as 8% of dogs suffer from canine compulsive disorder.

But critics are finding the whole idea to be a bone of contention. "Dogs are now being diagnosed with "lifestyle" illnesses so that drugs can be marketed to treat them," they said.

MP'S SHOCKER

Having missed out on the initial MPs' expenses scandal, the Daily Mail has been intent on keeping taxpayers' blood on the boil with more sordid revelations concerning politicians' cavalier approach to the hard-earned money of their voters.

Top of the list must be the champagne-guzzling antics of Labour MPs Bill Etherington and Geraldine Smith. The duo brought shame to Britain after organizing a champagne-drinking competition at an official reception in Paris attended by Council of Europe members.

Unknown to Etherington, as he downed countless glasses of bubbly, Smith was pouring hers into a plant pot, the Mail reported. According to a new book by fellow Labourite Paul Flynn MP, Etherington drank a near-fatal amount of alcohol.

"The reputation of the British is still damaged by this incident. It was not the idiotic competition or the wild inebriation that left an indelible memory. It was the display of projectile vomiting across the top table," Flynn recalls.

"He slipped into unconsciousness. A doctor was called. The patient was spreadeagled on a couch in an adjoining room with electrodes attached to his nipples," he added.

Flynn reveals that the incident took place ten years ago and was quickly covered up at the time. But according to the Mail Etherington has form: he's spent over £100,000 at 100 similar meetings over the last ten years when at least one diplomatic meeting ended riotously after he took part in an ouzo-drinking contest.

Meanwhile the Mail on Sunday was able to reveal that local town hall chiefs were also gallantly doing their bit to waste taxpayers' money by spending £1.4 million on morale-boosting trips for staff – while telling the public they're strapped for cash.

The Mail on Sunday said "council officials have paid for away days to £200 per night hotels, spas, go-karting tracks and even holiday village Center Parcs over the past four years.

"Ironically, the junkets, called team-building trips or planning meetings, are often used to discuss the councils' financial constraints," the newspaper blustered.



ALIEN INVADERS

It would appear that aliens from distant galaxies have been taking a worrying interest in our affairs of state in recent years. According to recently released documents held by the Ministry of Defence a UFO was spotted hovering over the house of Tory MP Michael Howard in 1997, the Daily Mirror reported.

Although Howard said he was unaware of the extra-terrestrial visit, witnesses claimed the huge triangular object carried lights around the outside and a disc attached to the back. The mystery object was said to be the size of two passenger jets.

When looking for an explanation the Mirror cited UFO expert Chris Rolfe, who joked, "It may have been looking for Mr Howard.

Labour MP Stephen Pound added: "If they were from Planet Zog it must have been a delivery of Tory policies."

