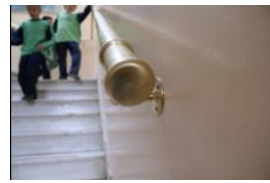
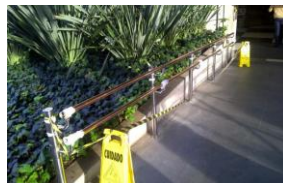


Copper Combats Contagion. Don't Pass It On.

Brussels, 14 November 2011: In recent years, media and health agencies across the world have been concerned about potential pandemics stemming from Bird Flu, Swine Flu and many other organisms. In the new film *Contagion* launched this month in Belgium, director Steven Soderbergh depicts a lethal pandemic and its devastating aftermath, which - according to America's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and renowned UK virologist John Oxford - is quite plausible.



Visions of a safer world? Copper touch surfaces installed in Chile, Brazil, Greece and Japan.

With an estimated 80% of infections spread via touch, surfaces such as door handles, stair rails and push buttons serve as reservoirs for infection. The film's "one touch transmission" premise is not as far-fetched as one might hope.

Professor Bill Keevil, Head of Microbiology at the University of Southampton, explains: "*Contagion is the communication of disease by direct or indirect contact. While this film is fiction, it is a fact that germs can survive on ordinary surfaces like door handles, stair rails and push buttons for days, even months, and be transferred on people's hands.*"

Hand-washing campaigns and attempts to alert the public to the spread of bacteria and viruses via touch surfaces have been an important step in raising awareness of the risks, but since compliance with hand-washing protocols is far from 100% even in hospitals - let alone amongst the general public - does more need to be done to reduce the risk of cross-contamination?

"The best way to protect yourself from germs is to wash your hands regularly" says Professor Keevil, *"but we simply don't do it enough. Copper is starting to be used in hospitals to break the chain of infection, and we should also be looking at where it can be employed in public spaces."*

Copper and its alloys - such as brasses, bronzes and copper-nickels - are inherently antimicrobial, meaning they are capable of continuously killing bacteria, viruses and fungi, in-between cleans. Consequently, touch surfaces made from these metals are being installed to help reduce healthcare-associated infections in facilities across the world, including a £1m intensive care unit at Manchester's Trafford General Hospital in the UK, and the CIGMA inter-generational care home in France.

The good news for the public is that authorities are also looking at ways to harness copper's antimicrobial properties in heavily-used spaces such as transport hubs to reduce contamination. In Chile, Santiago Bueras subway station is the first of many to be equipped with brass handrails. Sao Paulo Airport - one of the busiest in Brazil - has also opted for copper-containing handrails, and a school in Athens, Greece, has gone further, including antimicrobial copper door furniture to protect students' health. In a similar move, two childcare facilities in Japan have installed antimicrobial copper surfaces including food-serving trolleys, door furniture, sinks and taps.

A live experiment conducted at the University of Southampton in April 2011 demonstrated copper's ability to eliminate a huge load of MRSA bacteria within minutes. The event website, on which the day's film can be viewed, is: www.antimicrobialsurface.com.

For more information on the science behind copper's rise as an antimicrobial touch surface, and its deployment in hospitals, healthcare facilities, schools and public spaces, visit: www.antimicrobialcopper.org.

About The European Copper Institute

The European Copper Institute (ECI) is a joint venture between the world's leading mining companies, custom smelters and semi-fabricators (represented by the International Copper Association, Ltd) and the European copper industry. Its mission is to promote copper's benefits to modern society across Europe through its headquarters in Brussels and its network of eleven national Copper Development Associations. www.eurocopper.org

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