4 May 2009

By: Alexandra Popusoi, Gadgets Editor

Special drinks vending machine in Kyoto subway station
Kyodo News

Japanese Vending Machines Offer Free Drinks During Emergencies

These could prove to be lifesavers

Everyone probably knows that Japan is one of the world's most earthquake-prone nations and that it is trying to develop the best emergency response system. It seems that during past disasters, the country faced difficulties in providing clean drinking water to isolated places, while vending machines could have solved a part of the problem. But I guess no one remembers to bring along some spare change when an emergency situation strikes.

Well, now an improved system of beverage vending machines comes programmed to offer free drinks, but only when in emergency situations, InventorSpot reveals. These situations include earthquakes, floods, storms or any natural disaster that can leave the population out of potable water.

The vending machines will be first installed in subway and train stations, most likely followed by community centers and many other places where people may gather or even be trapped in emergency situations. In Kyoto, for example, 35 special vending machines have already been set up in all 31 of the city's subway stations.

The machines come equipped with battery backups and can hold up to 600 bottles of water and soft drinks. In the case of any emergencies mentioned above, they automatically switch on "free mode." If there is no power, a local member of the staff can perform this operation. We hope that these machines won't be abused by people in search of a free drink in non-emergency times.

While this may prove to be a lifesaver idea, the British have come up with a similar, but funkier concept, this time applied to another type of crisis: the financial one. Art student Ellie Harrison has designed a vending machine that dispenses free snacks whenever BBC reports bad news about the economy. This works by tracking BBC's RSS feed through a connected monitor. It is only an experiment for the time being, created as a part of her residency at the Plymouth College of Art.

The conclusion is that, whatever scares you the most, at least you can now enjoy the pleasure of getting free stuff during bad times.

We are just a few, but there are many of you, Softpedia users, out there. That's why we thought it would be a good idea to create an email address for you to help us a little in finding gadgets we missed. Interesting links are bound to be posted with recognition going mainly to those who submit. The address is .

Copyright (c) 2001-2012 Softpedia. All rights reserved. Softpedia™ and Softpedia™ logo are registered trademarks of SoftNews NET SRL.