Press Release

Can't convince? Confuse!

Cola majors resort to misinformation to counter the CSE report

New Delhi, August 17, 2003: From attacking CSE's testing methodology; trying to pass off water tests instead of tests on the final product; using the WTO as a bogeyman; questioning the existence of laboratories in the country that can test their products; to even questioning the existence of standards elsewhere in the world. Pepsi and Coca-Cola are trying every trick in the corporate book to discredit concerns raised by the CSE report on pesticides in aerated drinks sold in India.

The mainstay of this strategy has been to discredit the methodologies of the CSE study. This is not the first time CSE has released such studies, however. CSE used similar methodology to test bottled water 6 months ago, following similar procedures, and the results were proven correct by government testing. The gas chromotographic technique used by the CSE laboratory is a sophisticated methodology that gives accurate results. A key criticism of the cola companies has been that the results were not confirmed using a mass spectrophotometer (a detector used with gas chromotograph). ***As a matter of fact, they were.*** This confirmatory test was carried out in an independent laboratory – which is why the results were not included in the CSE study. They will be made available to the government committee looking into the matter.

The two companies fault the CSE laboratory for 'deviations' from the testing methodology equipment operating parameters prescribed by the USEPA, such as the column used, the use of nitrogen instead of helium as the carrier gas, the temperature programme etc. ***To begin with, some of these allegations are simply not correct.*** They are an attempt to mislead by resorting to technical terms not easily understood by consumers. For instance, the companies have gone on record saying the method (UEPA 8141A) used by CSE is for water, not for soft drinks. In fact, as the title clearly shows, the method is to test *Organophosphorus*

*Compounds by Gas Chromatography: Capillary Column Technique**. It can be used to test for organophosphorus compounds in solids and liquids.*** The companies fault the column used. Yet, ***the USEPA methodology clearly lists capillary columns of 0.25 mm, DB 5 (used by CSE), as suitable apparatus***.

Moreover, the USEPA test methodology equipment operating parameters are indicative, not rigid. They are optimised in actual practice during the experiments and may, therefore, vary with the column and instrument used. Which is why the CSE study clearly states that the tests are *based on* the USEPA methodology. The 'deviations' listed by the two companies do not change the results. For instance, nitrogen can – and is – used as an alternative for helium as a carrier gas, because it is easily available in the required purity grade. The important quality is that it is an inert gas, like helium.

The other company challenges the CSE definition for what can be considered "safe" intake of pesticides (defined as the "accepted daily intake", or ADI). ***In yet another attempt to mislead, the company quotes older WHO guidelines, which have since been revised****.* If the latest figures are used, in the case of Lindane, for instance, a child weighing 10 kgs has more than 6 times the ADI allotted to drinking water by the WHO in one 300 ml bottle of soft drink. (The company takes an adult weighing 60 kgs as its benchmark – where the ADI is obviously higher. But even then, in the example quoted above, a 60-kg adult would consume a little over the ADI allotted to drinking water in one bottle of cola).

It is heartening to have the representatives of an American MNC warn a developing country like India of the perils of adopting the EU norms and setting standards that are too high, which will render everything we eat and drink inedible, and harm our farmers, manufacturers and service providers. There is a certain irony in this argument being used by multi-billion dollar corporations who claim (and have the wherewithal) to follow the best global standards. Our concern, however, is the public health of Indians, not whether the government adopts EU norms or not. We will definitely be happier if the government comes up with its own set of norms, ***as long as these are scientifically defendable***. If the scientists of the country feel that Indian norms should be even more stringent than EU norms, given that deadlier pesticides are used more indiscriminately in this country, so be it.

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