

PRESS RELEASE

CSE dares cola companies to come clean

No more spins, no more half truths. Clean up your bottles, says CSE in an open challenge to the soft drink majors

New Delhi, August 7, 2006: The CSE study had found that 57 bottles from 12 states contained residues anywhere between 10-50 times above the final (not notified) standard. In this one week, the two companies – PepsiCo and Coca-Cola – have not released information about even one bottle of their product they have tested in 2005 or 2006. They want us to believe that they are safe because film stars drink their product, or because other food in India is contaminated. “This is a clever spin and will not fool the Indian consumer,” says CSE.

These companies are masters of spin and are misleading the Indian public. This is clearly unacceptable. “The bottomline is that the drinks are unsafe because the pesticide residues we detected are way above the final (not notified) standards,” restates CSE. The companies want to make us forget their contamination by saying that the rest of the country is contaminated, so what can they do! Their insinuation is that they are being targeted because they are poor multinational companies. **Their star endorser, Shahrukh Khan, was today quoted in the media saying “We are a filthy country.” Is he, therefore, implying that we deserve filthy products?**

PepsiCo has released advertisements in different newspapers today, which according to CSE, is clever copywriting full of half-truths. The advert says they are clean because they are meeting drinking water standards. The data they put out in their defence is from the 2004 Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC). **“But they are selectively quoting from the JPC report to mislead us,” says CSE.** For instance, while the advertisement issued by Pepsi says that pesticides in its Diet Pepsi are “below limit”, it conveniently forgets to add that the same sample exceeds the limit for DDT, a banned and deadly pesticide, by 80 per cent.

Worse, the companies use data from two brands to say that they are clean, but hide the data from three other brands, which indicts them for being unsafe because they were not meeting the drinking water standards. The same report says that Blue Pepsi is higher by 5.2 times, Mirinda Lemon by 4.2 times, and Mirinda Orange 3.4 times than the drinking water standards (see table).

It also does not tell you that data for individual pesticides is even more deadly. Mirinda Lemon exceeded the safe limit of chlorpyrifos by eight times and that of DDT by nine times. Based on this, the JPC had concluded: “The Committee feels that claims made by the cola companies in their advertisement tantamount to misleading the public as their products do contain pesticides, which have ill effect on human health in the long run.”

S no.	Brand	JPC found in 2004 (number of times the packaged water standard)	CSE found in 2006 (number of times the packaged water standard)	Companies data 2006
1.	Blue Pepsi	5.2 times higher	Not available	?
2.	Mirinda Lemon	4.2 times higher	16.2 times higher	?
3.	Mirinda Orange	3.4 times higher	21.4 times higher	?
4.	Diet Pepsi	Within standard	--	?
5.	PepsiCo	Within standard	30.4 times higher	?
6.	Seven-Up		25 times higher	?

CSE would like to know if the companies have been testing their products since then. If they are, what does the data show? And if they are not, then how do they claim that they are still safe? “Where is the evidence that they are right?” asks CSE.

Safe, because others are unsafe

The companies also want us to believe that they are safe because the rest of India is ‘unsafe’. Two wrongs do not make a right and this is clearly some clever spin-doctoring so that the focus is not on the two companies anymore. Safety is defined as meeting standards. CSE says that these products are unsafe because they exceed the final (not notified) standards by 10-50 times. The companies also cannot say that groundwater is contaminated because they have the technology to clean it up.

The fact also is that any food – from milk to apples – which does not meet the standards is unsafe and must be regulated. The environmental community, including CSE, is working hard to minimise this contamination. “The pesticide industry has filed numerous cases against us to stifle our work and voice. This will not deter us. But this does not mean that colas are safe,” points out CSE.

The fact also is that standards for pesticide residues are set based on nutrition that the food provides. We cannot compare apples with soft drinks. We cannot compare milk with soft drinks. Milk is essential and it gives us nutrition. But soft drinks are non-essential, non-nutritive. They should not have pesticides. They are unsafe, asserts CSE. No amount of scientific skullduggery can deny that.

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