

P R E S S R E L E A S E

“Our results are from an entirely different batch (of soft drinks) than CSE and are not comparable with CSE results,” says the laboratory report of the government. Why was this fact not revealed by the government, wonders CSE

New Delhi, August 28, 2003: The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), while welcoming the belated partial release of the laboratory analysis of pesticide residues in soft drink samples done by the Central Food and Technological Research Institute for the health ministry, is aghast to find that the government did not reveal the full picture in its statement to the Parliament. CSE believes that the doubts and confusion about the methodology and results would have been instantly clarified had the reports been tabled the very same day that the minister chose to address the Parliament.

For instance, the government statement had highlighted the high variation between the government results and CSE's findings. It was said that while the government labs found that in 75 per cent of the samples pesticide residues were only 1.2 to 5.22 times above the EU limits, CSE reported between 11-70 times above the limit. This was a discrepancy that could not be explained, and therefore, the CSE report was questioned and on the basis of the low levels of pesticide residues found, the samples were declared "legal" and therefore, safe. “The results clearly show that all the 12 samples do not have pesticide residues of the high order as was alleged in the CSE report,” said the minister’s statement.

But strangely, what the government did not chose to say is what the scientists make crystal clear in their report. The CFTRI report categorically states that “as the samples analysed by CFTRI was entirely from a different batch than the CSE samples, the results obtained are not comparable with the results of CSE”. This clearly means that it is not that our report, its methodology, or its findings were wrong, but that the samples tested were completely different. A careful comparison of the batch numbers tested by CFTRI and CSE reveals that the entire numbering structure is different. Therefore, clearly the variation is due to differences in the batches and the samples tested, as the laboratory admits.

This variation makes the methodology used for sample collection very important. CSE would also like to point out that the government’s report is not definitive about the sampling method employed for its tests. The report says that the samples of the 12 brands were “from Jai Drinks Pvt Ltd, Jaipur, Varun Beverages Ltd, Jodhpur and Mathura, and Hindustan Cola Beverages, Ghaziabad”. It, however, does not specify whether the samples were picked up from the markets or from the plants, by whom and on which date. CSE has always maintained that sampling is critical in such tests: samples must be randomly picked up from the markets and this must be done by the scientists themselves, as provided in the government's prescribed sampling methodology.

Secondly, in its statement to the Parliament, government had said that "an important observation of both laboratories is that Malathion, which was alleged to be 87 times the EU limit as per CSE report, was found to be totally absent in all the samples". It is well known that Malathion is a chemical that "breaks down" very fast. Therefore, what CSE expected is for the laboratory to

check for its breakdown product, Malaoxon, which is also highly toxic to humans. However, according to the report, this was not done.

Also, what the government did not highlight is that the laboratory had found lindane and chlorpyrifos in 100 per cent of the samples checked, exactly similar to what CSE had found.

Finally, this report pertains only to the tests done at CFTRI, Mysore. In the Parliament, the government had announced results from the Central Food Laboratory, Kolkata, but it has chosen to still not release this report. CSE requests the Union ministry of health to expedite the release of this second report, before its veracity and authenticity is in doubt.

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