

PRESS RELEASE

Government committee plays into the hands of soft drink manufacturers Chooses to delay and prevaricate on implementing the JPC recommendations on pesticides in soft drinks

Soft drink manufacturers call a report of the Indian Parliament “unscientific”

Committee agrees to set up another committee for year-long monitoring before deciding standards for pesticide residues in soft drinks

New Delhi, June 24, 2004: A meeting of the Pesticide Residues Sub-Committee was held in New Delhi today in Nirman Bhavan – office of the Union ministry of health and family welfare. The agenda of the meeting was to recommend standards for pesticide residues in soft drinks, as recommended by the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC).

But what has been learnt from officials at the meeting is that the sub-committee managed to block the implementation of the JPC recommendations. In its last meeting, held in March 2004, just a month after the JPC report was tabled in Parliament, the sub-committee had invited 21 stakeholders to present their views on the issue. Strangely, this list included cold drink majors such as Coca Cola and PepsiCo, industry associations and bottlers, but not the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), which had tested the soft drinks for pesticide residues.

But this is not so strange, considering the deliberations and mood of the sub-committee. After hours of deliberation this morning, the sub-committee, instead of setting final product standards for carbonated water (soft drinks), decided to undertake a nationwide monitoring of soft drinks for pesticide residues. Worse still, the sub-committee recommended setting up of another expert group to work out the modalities of the monitoring exercise. The sub-committee’s recommendation will now be forwarded to the Union health minister, via the Central Committee for Food Standards (CCFS).

This is an amazing development and should be construed as nothing less than an attempt to undermine the legislative significance of the Parliamentary Committee. The committee had in its six months already deliberated on the issue of standard setting and had clearly directed government to set up stringent standards for carbonated beverages in the country. “The reason that the other countries have not fixed such limits should not dissuade our lawmakers in attempting to do so, particularly when a vulnerable section of our population who are young and constitute a vast national asset are consuming the soft drinks,” reads the JPC’s report. “Unsafe even if trace” should be the eventual goal, the JPC had concluded.

The Union health ministry’s sub-committee instead supports the industry position, which was articulated to it by one of the soft drink giants, PepsiCo. In its presentation before the sub-committee, recorded in the minutes, the company dismissed the JPC recommendations as “unscientific”.

The decision of the sub-committee is nothing but an exercise in prevarication, delay and obfuscation. CSE hopes that the new health minister will not succumb to these tactics as this will destroy the mandate given to him to ensure food safety and water security for all.

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