

PRESS RELEASE

Soft Drinks Still Unsafe...

- **Finds the 2006 nationwide study by Centre for Science and Environment (CSE)**
- **Little done since 2003, when CSE found unsafe levels of pesticides in soft drink samples from Delhi**
- **The Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) had asked for standards for carbonated beverages; the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has formulated standards. But the finalised standards have not been notified**
- **Our health, particularly the health of our children, seems to be of little concern to the regulator, the Union ministry of health and family welfare**

New Delhi, August 2, 2006: Three years after CSE released its findings on pesticide residues in soft drinks, a new nationwide study shows nothing much has changed: soft drinks remain unsafe and unhealthy. And public health remains severely compromised. Worse, even the directions given by the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) have been disregarded: standards for safety have been finalised but blocked because of company opposition. Our health is nobody's business, it would seem, indicts the study.

The 2006 CSE study tests 57 samples of 11 soft drink brands, from 25 different manufacturing plants of Coca-Cola and PepsiCo, spread over 12 states. The study finds pesticide residues in **all** samples; it finds a **cocktail** of 3-5 different pesticides in all samples — on an average 24 times higher than BIS norms, which have been finalised but not yet notified. The levels in some samples — for instance, Coca-Cola bought in Kolkata — exceeded the BIS standards by 140 times for the deadly pesticide Lindane. Similarly, a Coca-Cola sample manufactured in Thane contained the neurotoxin Chlorpyrifos, 200 times the standard. "This is clearly unacceptable as we know that pesticides are tiny toxins and impact our bodies over time," says Sunita Narain, director, CSE.

The current study was conducted by the same Pollution Monitoring Laboratory of CSE, which had tested samples in 2003. It will be recalled that the two soft drink companies had raised numerous issues regarding the veracity of the CSE study and the capabilities of its laboratory staff, which were scrutinised and debunked by JPC in its report. The JPC endorsed the methodology and the findings of the 2003 CSE study. This time, further improvements have been made. Firstly, the laboratory is now accredited with ISO 9001:2000 quality management system. Secondly, the laboratory has confirmed the presence of the pesticides using an expensive and state of art equipment — the GS-MS. "We have fully complied with the JPC directions and are even more confident about our findings," says Chandra Bhushan, associate director at CSE.

In 2003, the average level of pesticide residues in Delhi samples was 34 times above the same BIS standard. But this cannot be taken even as a marginal reduction, because this time, shockingly, CSE has found pesticide residues as high as 52 times in bottles bought in Kolkata, and 42 times in bottles bought in Nainital and Gorakhpur. Similarly, bottles bought in Mumbai, manufactured in Thane and Nagpur, are 34 times above the BIS standard.

The dumber number game

“Safety is also not only about high or low numbers,” explains Narain. Companies tell us that they are safe because pesticide residues are tiny and are lower in their products than what is found in other products — say, milk and juice. But this is scientific juggling. Pesticides are tiny toxins and deadly for us if we are exposed to quantities higher than what is defined as an acceptable limit. In other words, our exposure, through the food we eat and water we drink, must be kept under the threshold of safety. The safe limit — or the standard — in each product is set keeping in mind the nutrition-pesticide trade-off — a quota for residues can be allowed in nutritive food like milk or juice, but not in non-nutritive products like carbonated beverages. This is why, since the release of its 2003 study, CSE has demanded that government must set standards for safe levels of pesticide residues in soft drinks.

“This is a grave public health scandal,” says Narain. In early February 2004, confirming the unsafe levels of pesticides in soft drinks, JPC had directed government to set standards for these residues in the products. Since then, the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has, in its sectional committee, met over 20 times to deliberate on the standards. In October 2005, after months of data analysis and discussion with all stakeholders — including the two soft drink majors — the standards were finalised by the committee. In March 2006, the committee met once again to reconfirm the standards. But since then, the status remains the same: the standards are finalised but not notified.

The final standards are ironically being opposed by the Union ministry of health and family welfare, which argues that more research needs to be done. The ministry has, in the last three years, set up committee after committee, and various sub-committees, to examine the safety concerns, but with little progress. Clearly, ‘good’ science cannot become a pretext for prevarication and obstruction. “We know that the companies are strongly opposed to this standard as it will bring them under the ambit of regulators,” says CSE which has also put deliberations on all issues concerning the setting of standards, in the public domain.

This is an issue of public health and so, it is not negotiable. Our demand is simple, says CSE: The government must notify the final product standards and make these mandatory for soft drink companies, so that soft drinks, consumed particularly by children, are checked and regulated. No more delays. No more procedures. We want safety first and foremost.

For the complete Down To Earth cover story, the CSE lab report, the press conference presentation, this press release and related documents, please visit:

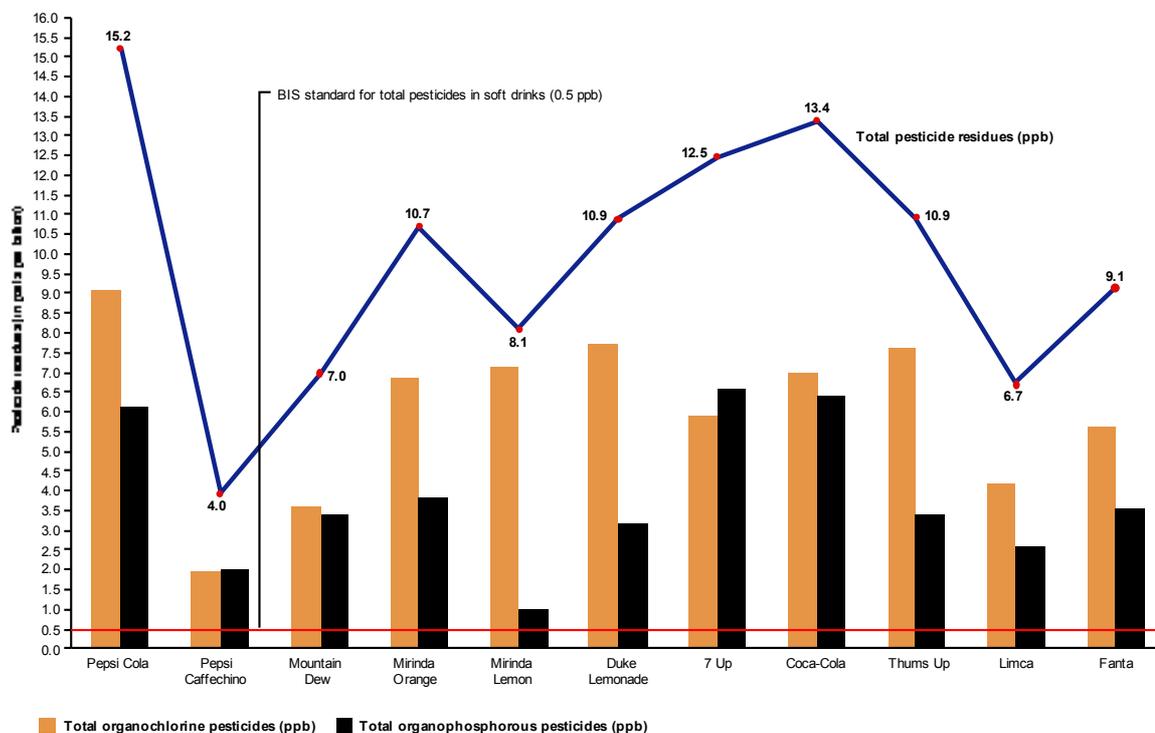
<http://www.cseindia.org/misc/cola-indepth/cola2006/cola-index.htm>

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Highlights of the 2006 CSE study on pesticides in colas-II:

- A cocktail of 3-6 pesticides was present in all samples.
- Lindane (a confirmed carcinogen) levels were over 54 times above the BIS standard; in one Coca-Cola sample from Kolkata, it was 140 times higher.
- Chlorpyrifos (a known neurotoxin) levels were 47 times higher; a Coca-Cola sample from Mumbai had a 200 times higher level.
- Heptachlor, banned in India, was found in 71 per cent of the samples, at levels 4 times higher than BIS standards.
- Average amount of pesticide residues found in all the samples was 11.85 parts per billion (ppb) — 24 times higher than the BIS standards for total pesticides in soft drinks (0.5 ppb).
- Pepsi cola contained 30 times higher residues on an average.
- Coca-Cola contained 27 times higher residues on an average.

Pesticide residues: brand-wise



Contamination: same and more

