

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**“If we can drink them, we can test them, says CSE”**

- **UK lab data on soft drink tests is biased; the samples were provided by the company. Would the UK government accept data, paid for by the company for regulation?**
- **Indian labs and CSE capable of testing for pesticide residues. If we can drink their products, we can certainly test them.**
- **If Coke products are so clean, then why is it resisting standards?**
- **Government should not succumb to foreign arm-twisting. The issue is about regulations and the fact that these companies cannot work outside Indian law.**

**New Delhi, August 14, 2006:** Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) has said that Coca-Cola’s recent claim that a London-based laboratory has tested its products and given them a clean chit is completely untenable. “Moreover, the company’s contention that only a foreign laboratory can test its products is patronising and borders on racism,” said CSE. The implication is that the CSE Pollution Monitoring Laboratory is not capable of testing its products and therefore, its results are wrong: CSE refutes this emphatically.

### **The CSE laboratory**

CSE would like to make it clear that its laboratory is fully equipped to test soft drinks. It has used an internationally established and accepted methodology for its analysis; its equipments are state-of-the-art and include the GC-MS, which is used to reconfirm the tests for pesticide residues. The CSE laboratory was scrutinised by the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), which had found its findings to be correct. The Indian government laboratories, which had tested the products in 2003, also found pesticide residues in the drinks.

It is also being said by Coca-Cola that CSE’s laboratory is not NABL-accredited and therefore, its analysis is not correct. But it had been accepted by the JPC that as very few laboratories in the country are NABL-accredited for pesticide residues in water, it is more important to get certification for quality control. CSE laboratory has – since then – been certified under ISO 9001. It has also improved its capacity to test by procuring a GC-MS, as recommended by JPC.

### **The London lab report: a few questions**

It is not CSE’s intention to raise issues with the UK-based Central Science Laboratories (CSL). However, a few clarifications are due:

One, the samples have been provided by Coca-Cola and therefore, these cannot be compared to the CSE study, which collected samples from the open market. Would such a study, which has been sponsored and funded by Coca-Cola, be used for regulatory purposes in the UK?

Two, the data provided by Coca-Cola is for samples provided in June 2005. Why is this report being released now? Has the laboratory not tested samples regularly?

Three, the laboratory uses the name of the UK government's department for environment, food and rural affairs. But will the UK government allow contamination beyond stipulated levels in its own country? Recently, it recalled beverages from the market when these were found to exceed the non-existent domestic benzene standards by just 1 ppb. In this case, the government used WHO drinking water standards to say that these products were unsafe and must be recalled. In our case, we have found drinks to exceed the final (but not notified) standards by 10-50 times. Would the UK government have allowed this? Or is our life cheaper?

Four, the laboratory says that it did not find any pesticide residues. What is the laboratory's limit of detection? Laboratories can only check above their limits of detection and quantification, which specify the sensitivity of their equipment.

We ask this, because in 2003, this same laboratory tested one bottle for Coca-Cola and gave the product a clean hit. CSE confirmed that this laboratory's limit of quantification (LOQ) was 0.5 to 2.5 ppb. Therefore, it could only detect and quantify pesticide levels in soft drinks if these levels were 5-25 times higher than the EU limit (or the BIS's final but not notified standard). In other words, it could not detect pesticides because its equipment did not have the sensitivity to find them. In comparison, CSE's laboratory equipment's LOQ is 0.01-0.2 ppb for pesticides detected in soft drink.

### **Validating the test methodology**

The two soft drink companies have argued that there can be no regulations because their products are multi-ingredient and therefore, cannot be tested. CSE asks: how then are they now claiming to have tested their products? Or are they saying that their products can only be tested by a UK laboratory? Then it may be appropriate to say that only the products should also be sold in UK.

It is clear that Indian laboratories have the equipment and capacity to test this 'complex' – sugar and water – product. CSE has used the methodology laid down by the USEPA and used by governments across the world, which is for testing liquid matrix -- any complex multi-ingredient product, which has water and other substances. All laboratories are trained to distinguish between molecules of pesticides against the interferences of the product: we do not a British lab to tell us this fact. CSE, in fact, used a GC-MS to reconfirm the presence of pesticide residues.

Also, if these products are so clean and meet the EU standards (and also the BIS final standards), then why are these companies opposing the setting of regulations? Do they have something to hide?

### **Awaiting government response**

The ball is clearly in the court of the government, says CSE. The companies will use any tactics – foreign or strong-armed – to pressurise us to believe that they are clean and that

they should not be regulated. The government regulations have been finalised but not notified, because of pressure from the companies.

The question now is, will the government cave in to threats by the US government to delay and prevaricate on this matter which concerns our health? Or will it do what is right: notify the BIS standards immediately?

### **The FDI bogey**

Let us be clear that raising the threat of stopping foreign direct investment (FDI) is a shameful act of desperation. This is a case of how large and powerful corporations are misusing their power to pressurise our government not to notify standards, which have been finalised by our own committee of top scientists. This is a case of corruption and abuse of power. The fact is that FDI needs regulated environments and rule of law, not corporate cronyism and weak regulators.

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