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Coca Cola: Pollution in a Bottle?

Coca-Cola currently offers more than 400 brands in over 200 countries or territories, and sells 1.6 billion servings each day with estimated global sales for Coca-Cola and all of its bottling partners of \$60 billion.

The company has operated a franchised distribution system dating from 1889. They produce a syrup concentrate which is then sold to various bottlers throughout the world who add water and sugar to the secret concentrate and turn it into soda, distributing it in cans and bottles.

The first person to bottle Coke was Joseph Biedenharn in Vicksburg, Miss., in 1894. In 1912 he bought a bottling franchise in Monroe, Louisiana and moved to Monroe to establish the plant in 1913.

In July, 2010, Coca-Cola Enterprises announced it will cease its bottling production in Monroe in September at the historic Ouachita Coca-Cola plant. A Coca-Cola Enterprises spokesperson said the company will continue to employ 180 at the Monroe facility, which will operate as a distribution and sales center. The facility currently produces 2-liter and 20-ounce plastic bottles of Coke.

So where will the soda originate from?

Let's hope its not the UK or India.

Pesticides

Last year, drinks sold by Coca-Cola in the **UK** were found to contain **pesticides up to 300 times** the level allowed in tap or bottled water. Researchers tested 102 cans and bottles of soft drinks bought from 15 countries, for the presence of 100 pesticides. The UK products were bought in London, Cambridge, Edinburgh, St Andrews and at Gatwick Airport.

Experts said the levels found were low under the maximum residue levels allowed for fruit, but they were **'very high'** and **'up to 300 times'** the figure permitted for bottled or tap water.



The average level of the total pesticide contamination of the British drinks was 17.4 parts per billion – **34.6 times the EU maximum** residue level for water. Coca-Cola GB insisted the products are safe. A spokesman said;

The generally miniscule levels that were detected were well within the acceptable daily intake levels and these findings should reassure consumers there is no safety issue here.

Similar results have been found in **India**. Tests conducted by the Pollution Monitoring Laboratory (PML) of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) in 2003 showed that total pesticides in all Coca-Cola brands on average were 0.0150 mg/l, 30 times higher than the European Economic Commission (EEC) limit. **All samples contained residues of four extremely toxic pesticides and insecticides;**

- * lindane
- * DDT
- * malathion and,
- * chlorpyrifos.

Each sample had enough poison to cause – in the long term – cancer, damage to the nervous and reproductive systems, birth defects and severe disruption of the immune system.

More recently, findings published in The Hindu, June 5, 2010 submitted by The Hazards Centre, a non-governmental organization (NGO), found high levels of toxic chromium **and other pollutants in the soil and water** around five Coca-Cola and Pepsico plants in North India.

The study was released two months after a Kerala government panel, using the 'polluter pays principle', ruled that Coca Cola be held liable for Indian Rupees 216 crore (US\$ 48 million) for damages caused as a result of the company's bottling operations in Plachimada, in the state of Kerala, in south India. The Kerala state cabinet's decision is based on the report and recommendations of a High Power Committee which released a report on March 22, 2010 holding Coca-Cola responsible for causing pollution and water depletion in Plachimada.

The Coca-Cola bottling plant in Plachimada has remained shut down since March 2004 as a result of a community-led campaign challenging Coca-Cola's abuse of water resources. Now, five other communities — Mehdiganj and Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh, Kaladera and Chopanki in Rajasthan, and Panipat in Haryana — are also claiming that the soft drinks plants in their vicinity are responsible for their troubles. Sharafat Ali, a Ghaziabad farmer says;

Our people are suffering from skin problems and stomach sickness.

According to Hazards Centre director, Dunu Roy, 59 of 85 water samples showed chromium concentration above the permissible limit of 0.05 parts per million (ppm), with some samples going as high as 5.64 ppm.

We found that chromium was the most common pollutant, he said.

Cadmium and lead were also detected in samples from Ghaziabad. Concentrations were high in samples collected from the drains where factory effluents were discharged, showing that it is finding its way out from the manufacturing process.

Coca Cola rejected the study's findings, saying that their operations conform to Pollution Control Board (PCB) norms. The company says that a comprehensive 2009 study carried out by the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute and IL&FS Ecosmart at Kaladera and Mehandiganj found no adverse impacts on soil and groundwater quality.

Water is the main ingredient in all of our products and we have a shared interest in protecting the quantity and quality of this precious resource. It would be unreasonable for anyone to think the company itself would contaminate its main raw material,

said a release from Hindustan Coca-Cola beverages Private Limited.

However, this statement contradicts a report by the city of Beijing government who last year listed the Beijing plants of US soft drink giants Coca-Cola and PepsiCo among the top 12 factories causing major **water pollution in China's capital**. PepsiCo-Beijing and Coca-Cola-Beijing refused immediate comment on the issue when contacted by the Associated Press.

In India, PepsiCo insisted that its plants met PCB norms, but declined to comment on the specific charges, saying that the report had not been shared with them. The study was conducted between 2006 and 2008, with samples being tested at the People's Science Institute, Dehra Dun. Amit Srivastava of the India Resource Center, an international campaigning organization, said;



“The best thing Coca-Cola can do is to accept the will of the people and the state – pack up, pay up and leave.”

We have attended every Coca-Cola shareholders meeting in the US since 2004 to remind Coca-Cola shareholders that the company management was being derelict in its duties by not disclosing the real financial liabilities the company was incurring in India.

Coca-Cola shareholders need to pay attention because the company continues to have an atrocious record in India, and communities and even governments are not just going to sit back and take Coca-Cola's abuses. This should serve as a wake up call.”

Some Coca-Cola shareholders are beginning to wake up.

In April, 2010, 22 percent of Coca-Cola shareholders voted in favor of a resolution urging the company to disclose how it is responding to public fears over bisphenol A (BPA) used in the linings of Coke's beverage cans. The company dismissed the proposal, saying it did not think the information requested in the proposal 'would be useful to our shareholders'.

A Coca-Cola spokesman added; “We are monitoring the research and regulatory developments relating to Bisphenol A (BPA) and are engaging with stakeholders who express concerns about it. We will continue to take our guidance on this issue from national and international regulatory authorities and to take whatever steps

are necessary, based on sound scientific principles, to ensure that any package technology is safe for our consumers. All available scientific evidence and testing shows that drinks in aluminum and steel cans are safe.

BPA levels in canned beverages are extremely low, and it is physically impossible to consume enough canned beverages to ever approach the daily BPA limit established by leading health authorities, including those in the United States, Europe and Canada.”

The shareholder challenge is based upon concerns that Coke’s alleged failure to provide consumers with sufficient information regarding the health hazards associated with BPA could threaten the company’s reputation and competitive standing. (8)

“Coke’s assumption that BPA does not pose a public health risk, in the face of mounting regulatory restrictions and consumer concerns exposes our company to regulatory, legal, and competitive risks,” said Michael Passoff, senior program director at As You Sow. “Coke does not provide investors with information about these financial risks.”

BPA and Health

In a review article published online May 25 in Nature Reviews Endocrinology, the researchers express the need for more complex strategies for studying how this chemical affects health but report that ample evidence already supports changing public health and environmental policies to protect the public from exposure to BPA. **Particularly at risk are developing embryos.**

“The evidence indicates that exposure to BPA and **other endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs)** may contribute to diseases that manifest during adult life, such as increased cancer rates in the industrialized world. These chemicals have also been linked to **obesity, altered behavior, and infertility,**” says author Ana Soto, MD, professor in the department of anatomy and cellular biology at Tufts University School of Medicine (TUSM).

“Developing embryos ‘read’ environmental cues as a forecast of the outside world. These cues can affect the way certain genes are expressed and in this way alter the structure and function of organs. Studies in rodents show that EDCs can cause harm at much lower levels if exposure happens during organ formation as opposed to exposures during adulthood.”

In previous studies, Soto has observed that exposure to even trace levels of BPA can increase cancer risk in adulthood.

Co-author Carlos Sonnenschein, MD, professor in the department of anatomy and cellular biology at TUSM added;

“The strength and breadth of existing research on the negative effects of EDCs, including bisphenol A, warrants immediate action to reduce EDC exposure, particularly among the developing fetus and women of reproductive age.”

Baby Products

- California is moving close to a ban **on bisphenol A in baby products**. The state Assembly voted 41-31 on July 1, 2010, to approve a ban on BPA. The bill now goes to the Senate.

California's ban would go into effect January 1, 2012 on baby bottles and other feeding products for children ages 3 and younger. The ban would further apply to infant formula cans starting July 1, 2012.

- New York recently became the fifth state this year – and the seventh in the last two years – to enact a ban on BPA. If Gov. David Paterson signs the legislation, as expected, New York would be the largest state to date with a BPA ban.
- Vermont, Connecticut, Wisconsin, Washington, Maryland, Minnesota, the city of Chicago and four counties in New York state – Albany, Schenectady, Suffolk and Rockland all have BPA bans.

Osteoporosis (brittle bone disease)

Women who drink four or more cola beverages per week have a higher risk of developing osteoporosis, according to a study published in the October 2006 issue of the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition. (10)

It reported regular cola consumption was linked to lower bone mineral density in all women studied, regardless of other factors such as smoking, alcohol consumption and calcium intake. **Low bone mineral density increases the risk of osteoporosis, also known as brittle bone disease.** The results were similar for regular, diet and decaffeinated colas.

“The more cola women drank, the lower their bone mineral density was,” said Katherine Tucker, the lead researcher and from Tufts University. An estimated 10 million Americans suffer from osteoporosis, which causes bones to become brittle and weak. Fractures associated with osteoporosis can be slow to heal, and they also can cause debilitating pain, disability, deformities and occasionally death.

The hospitalization rate of patients admitted for treatment of hip, pelvis and other fractures associated with osteoporosis increased by 55 percent between 1995 and 2006, according to the latest News and Numbers from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

An extensive study published in January, 2006 revealed that Indians are also increasingly being afflicted with osteoporosis. This study, conducted by the National Institute for Research in Reproductive Health, shows that an estimated 61 million Indians suffer from osteoporosis. Commenting on the study, the director-general of the World Health Organization (WHO), Gro Harlem Brundtland said that osteoporosis will see a manifold increase in the developing world.

In India both genders are affected by osteoporosis, as shown by another study by the Britannia New Zealand Foods and the Arthritis Foundation of India. This has revealed that in cities like Kolkata and Chennai, 45 per cent of men have brittle bones! The WHO reveals that one out of three adult females in India suffers from osteoporosis, making India one of the worst affected countries in the world. The Arthritis Foundation of India says there has been an estimated 200 per cent jump in cases across Asia in 10 years. (12)

With over 1 billion servings of Coke consumed daily around the world, are we about to witness an osteoporosis epidemic?

Surely water would be the healthier option – as long as it's not sourced close to a Coca Cola bottling plant that is.

Who knows what's liable to be in it. One thing for sure, it'll be Coca-Cola's little secret.