

PRESS RELEASE

Stop threatening us, take us to court: CSE challenges pesticide industry

- Cola companies say their products have no pesticides.
- Pesticide companies say there are pesticides, but the levels are safe.
- Health ministry gives a clean chit to colas, then retracts.
- Pesticide industry, cola companies and health ministry are all using the pretext of “good science” to work against public health and interests.

New Delhi, August 25, 2006: The pesticide industry today again threatened Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) with legal action for its campaign against pesticide residues in soft drinks. “The pesticide industry has been behaving like the proverbial bully. It should immediately stop these intimidating tactics. We dare it to take us to court,” said CSE.

Within the last two months, the pesticide industry and its associations have sent two legal threats to CSE. And it is not CSE alone which has been at the receiving end of this industry’s rant: there are many others whom the industry has tried to intimidate and gag. CSE says that the only purpose of these threats is to “criminally intimidate people and organisations who work on public health by threatening with malicious prosecution. This practice is wholly wrong and is to stifle research, free speech and the public voice by threatening people with unfounded legal notices and prosecution”.

Such lawsuits, where the rights of individuals or institutions to bring matters of public interest to the notice of the public are questioned, are common in countries like the US. Common enough to be given a name: Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation or SLAPP for short. SLAPPs amount to silencing people into submission. They are not just “intimidation lawsuits”. They question the rights of individuals and institutions to speak out on a public issue, and to communicate their views to government officials. They question the right of people to tell their elected representatives what they think, want, or believe in – in effect, for attempting to influence government action.

The pesticide industry has chosen to again create confusion by raking up the dosage issue: by asking, how much soft drinks would be harmful – 5, 15 or 50 bottles. CSE points out that this is nothing but an effort by the industry to twist facts to its advantage. Pesticides are scientifically proven tiny toxins. Exposure to these toxins must be within the acceptable levels. Allowing any harmful substances in non-essential and non-nutritive items like soft drinks is unacceptable. Even the Joint Parliamentary Committee had said in its report: “Unsafe even if trace”.

According to CSE director Sunita Narain: “The right of individuals and organisations like CSE to carry out action in public interest and in favour of public health cannot be questioned. It is a right to hold industries and governments accountable for their action, and should be strengthened – not suppressed.”

For more details, please visit our website (www.cseindia.org) or speak with Souparno Banerjee on 98100 98142, or write to him at souparno@cseindia.org.

