

[Angry Toxicologist](#)

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[Coca-Cola agrees to get the benzene out of soda](#)

By [AngryToxicologist](#) | May 16, 2007

Well, you would have thought this was a no brainer, but it took a lawsuit to force their hand ([AJC story here](#)). Pepsi, Sunny D, Rockstar Energy Drink, Safeway, Publix, and Shasta did not settle and are still defendants in the lawsuit. (That drink to the right is looking a little more refreshing now, but can they still call it ‘classic’?)



In 1990, the FDA found out that if the mix of ascorbic acid (vitamin C) and a benzoate (either sodium or potassium) had the ability to form benzene, a carcinogen (A big component of the formation is heat and time, that’s why there is so much variation among even the same brand). The FDA met with the industry and they decided not to scare the consumers and have a voluntary fix. Wanna guess how well that worked out? Yes, over 15 years later, all the nuckleheads listed as defendants above still have benzene in some of their drinks.

How much benzene was in the drinks? Anywhere from [1-138 ppb](#). Here’s another tidbit: the EPA’s maximum contaminant level goal for benzene in water is zero. So it shouldn’t be in your water but it is okay in other stuff you drink. Okay, I don’t drink Sunny D or Rockstar Energy Drink, but do you know who do? Kids. I don’t think I’m okay with a carcinogen in kids drinks and I’m pretty sure that no one else is either. Well, no one except Sunny D, Pepsi, and friends.

Now, to really look at this critically, the amount of benzene you get from a can of one of the contaminated drinks is less than the amount you breathe in filling your car up with gas on a warm day. But I’d rather not add anymore on top of what I’m already getting, and I dare industry to try to make that pitch to consumers. “Drinking Sunny D is just as healthy as breathing gas fumes. Buy some for your kids today!”

Here’s the kicker, though: You can easily prevent the formation of benzene in the products. Why all this kicking and screaming over an easy fix? Heck, they said they’d do it 17 years ago! It’s not like it’s an impurity that they can’t get out or a breakdown product that they have to try and stop (contrary to the first line in the [Atlanta Journal Constitution story](#)). They’re mixing these two chemicals together. The fix: don’t. Hmmmm...it must just be too simple.

Do we really need more reasons for the [Safe Food Act of 2007](#)? If you’ve got any, send them to tox@angrytoxicologist.com.

Update: I just read the post on this over at [Effect Measure](#), and it brings up a good point. I’d much rather have melamine in my pet food (especially since it [isn’t very toxic](#)) than benzene in my drinks. I think we’d both

rather the Food and Drug Administration start acting like the FDA instead of just the _DA.

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11 Responses to “Coca-Cola agrees to get the benzene out of soda”

1. *Insistent Chemist* Says:

[May 16th, 2007 at 11:23 am](#)

I think another, unexamined angle of the benzene, melamine, and e coli in spinach are death of the national food uniformity act (a bill that passed the house to give the current fda preemptive authority over food) that went nowhere in the senate after the benzene story broke last year.

2. *Eric* Says:

[May 17th, 2007 at 2:14 am](#)

Look, it's comfort food.

Let it go.

If we die of Benzene poisoning is it really going to be from our soft drinks?

If it is then you drink too much freakin' soda.

If not, then, well you lived a good life and maybe still got Benzene poisoning from another source.

We all die and we all live longer than expected because of modern medicine; Do we really want to live longer?

3. *AngryToxicologist* Says:

[May 17th, 2007 at 7:19 am](#)

Eric,

You're entitled to your opinion but the point is, if it's really easy to take out and there are no benefits to keeping it in, why not do it? it's like buying a can of benzene and keeping it open in your basement. Is it going to give your kids leukemia? Maybe, maybe not, but why not just close it?

Also, if people want to take risks, that's fine with me, but I don't think companies should decide what risks are acceptable for people without informing them.

4. *toxicomaniac* Says:

[May 17th, 2007 at 10:24 am](#)

i like benzene when i wake up , during the morning , in the afternoon and a little before sleep.

5. [Martin F](#) Says:
[May 18th, 2007 at 12:15 am](#)

Great post: indeed time for Safe Food Act 2007.

Last year, Consumers Union of Japan tested softdrinks and so-called vitamin drinks (terribly popular here) and found benzene in most that had the mix of ascorbic acid (vitamin C) and benzoate acid (the highest level was found in Fanta Grape).

The government had also tested, and said yes, they had found benzene, but they would not make the results public. Earlier this year, the soft drink industry announced that it has stopped using the mix of the additives. Glad to see Coca Cola is taking this news seriously, but what are the others actually “defending” in the lawsuit?

6. [AngryToxicologist](#) Says:
[May 18th, 2007 at 8:13 am](#)

The right to be stupid? Honestly, I think it’s one of those things where they don’t care all that much about this issue but they don’t want to set a precedent of caving to pressure in a court. They want to make it as hard as possible for consumer advocates to push them to do something. It’s only the publicity of the cases that makes them settle.

7. [Friday Blog Roundup « The Pump Handle](#) Says:
[May 18th, 2007 at 3:06 pm](#)

[...] Revere at Effect Measure and Angry Toxicologist report that Coca-Cola has promised to get the benzene out of its products. (Two ingredients – [...])

8. [Grading the News: Benzoate in Soda edition at Angry Toxicologist](#) Says:
[June 4th, 2007 at 8:43 am](#)

[...] with ascorbic acid in soda to produce benzene. I wrote about Coca-Cola agreeing to stop the benzene here. Now, an expert in ageing at Sheffield University, who has been working on sodium benzoate since [...]

9. [Shirley](#) Says:
[July 9th, 2007 at 4:37 pm](#)

My dear mother always told me COKE was a killer. Noting a family member drank a lot of COKE for years due to pressure in his businesses and it eventually destroyed his kidneys, etc. and he died? She constantly told our family it was dangerous. She was a tea drinker and most healthy all her life as was my dad. It is appalling to me these big companies whether it be food, beverages or real juice to anything we put on our table for our families has dangers? Why? Companies contaminate food and juices with and without research for years and years until someone calls them on it? PLEASE? Oh, let us not let Congress off the hook either? If the government held their pay checks until they got their assigned work done for the people in our country, we would be a better nation and world. Then to read of the chemicals/chemical calories in our daily meals is most disgusting. I think healthy should be healthy, not covered in herbicides to pesticides from planting to the factories and add even more there for Pete’s sake? No one is immune not big company owners or board members. It does not stop there? It also contaminates the WATER that we cannot have life on this earth without it? Oh, then the soils, the air and our homes. Who can you trust? What we cannot escape is that all their negligence in getting the almighty dollar in their pockets, board and investors goes against nature and no amount of money will

be able to save them or their family members from disease, illnesses and early deaths jut like the rest of us? I again Ask why? I am a very proud grandparent in Texas that is very upset about this announcement among so many overs the years. That my family has been violated by these people even after it was brought to their attention years ago? No respect for COKE or the other beverage companies for not going the safe and tested route to bring us these beverages? The FDA is overrun with testing in trying to keep us all safe. If the companies would do the right thing from the get-go would not be so busy as well as our congress who only seem to play politics not look for solutions as a group hooked on money and

TV-itus? Bless the Angry Toxicologist! I am not a regular blogger. This 5th generation Texas gal do work to push earthwise living on this planet with action

10. *D* Says:

[August 21st, 2007 at 4:00 am](#)

Will Coke apply their new no-benzene formulation to products just in the US, or will this apply to all their products sold and manufactured worldwide? I am very concerned because from where I'm from, product safety standards and testing are almost non-existent, and the government is usually in cahoots with big corporations. If these large companies can behave disgustingly in a country like the US which has more vigilant consumers and consumer advocates, what more in Third World countries in Asia, Africa and South America? It is all very appalling how concern for human safety and well-being has been disregarded in the race for the all-mighty dollar.

11. *zweedledee* Says:

[September 7th, 2007 at 3:48 pm](#)

I would like to comment about soft drinks. While I was growing up our water tasted like rotten eggs, and my mom didn't buy bottled water. All she would buy was Dr. Pepper. And for space reasons, they were stored in the car. We had no ice cubes because my mom hated ice trays. I drank about 6-8 Dr. Peppers a day since I remember my life until I was 18 years old. For some reason, I was urinating on myself. I had no bladder control. I would just come out without me knowing. I went to a urologist and we analyzed what I was eating/drinking. To test, I drank only water and nothing else. I didn't change my food yet. AND TO MY SURPRISE, my symptoms that had lasted over a year completely went away after three days of not drinking Dr. Pepper. Now I am 28 and I can drink, coffee, tea, anything with caffeine. But if I drink Just one soft drink, I have incontinence for one whole day. Coincidence? I think not! The stuff is poison!! And people give it to babies!

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Author

AngryToxicologist is a scientist in the public health sector, knows plenty about toxicology, and is occasionally angry about it all.

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