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Benzene in Soft drinks and Leukaemia

The soft drinks giant the Coca-cola company was sued on the 25 of August 2006 in Washington U.S.A. This action was taken as there are great concerns about soft drinks containing a compound called "benzene" which has been shown to cause cancer. This case yet to be settled in court, follows a number of other lawsuits in other parts of the USA against manufactures of soft drinks containing benzene.

A number of studies have demonstrated the link between leukaemia cancer and benzene exposure.

Benzene has been linked to leukaemia since 1928. There have been extensive studies and research since then that confirms this link. Generally there is agreement that benzene causes Acute Myelogenous Leukaemia (AML), which is also known as Acute Non-Lymphocytic Leukaemia (ANLL). See Canosh – [Canada's National Occupational health and Safety Website](#) for more information about exposure to benzene.

WHAT IS BENZENE?

Benzene is a clear, colourless, highly volatile liquid; it has been manufactured and used for over a century. Benzene is mainly produced by the petrochemical and petroleum refining industries. It is a natural part of crude oil and natural gas; Benzene is also a by-product of "coking" in steel mills.

Although some benzene occurs naturally that does not make it a harmless chemical.

Benzene is used to manufacture a number of other chemical compounds, and has been in the past as an industrial solvent. Due to the toxicity of benzene this use has largely been stopped, although it is still used as a laboratory solvent.

Benzene is added to petrol (gasoline) due to its stabilizing properties. People living near petrol or service stations are likely to have increased exposures to benzene.

[Benzene is sometimes found in drinking water, primarily as a result of gasoline spills, or seepage from underground gasoline tanks. \(Aklund, 1993\)](#)

Benzene in soft drinks

Benzene can be formed in soft drinks. If the drinks contain ASCORBIC ACID and either SODIUM BENZOATE or POTASSIUM BENZOATE, a chemical reaction can occur if the drink is exposed to heat or light, this reaction forms BENZENE.

ASCORBIC ACID + SODIUM BENZOATE + heat = BENZENE

ASCORBIC ACID + SODIUM BENZOATE + light = BENZENE

ASCORBIC ACID + POTASSIUM BENZOATE + heat = BENZENE

ASCORBIC ACID + POTASSIUM BENZOATE + light = BENZENE

(Ascorbic acid is a form of Vitamin C added to the drink by the manufactures)

SETTLED LAWSUITS

The companies involved in the settled law suits are a company in Atlanta USA called In Zone Brands Inc. maker of BellyWashers and Preston. Also a Washington Company TalkingRain Beverage Co. They have legally agreed to change ingredients in the drinks and to offer refunds to purchasers.

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Apart from the Washington Coca-Cola lawsuit, there are other lawsuits still unsettled. In Kansas the legal proceedings include complaints against Coke's Vault Zero energy drink, PepsiCo Inc.'s Diet Wild Cherry and Kraft Food Inc.'s Crystal Light Sunrise Classic Orange. There are other similar lawsuits against Coca-cola and other beverage makers yet to be settled in Massachusetts, Florida, California, and New Jersey.

You can read more about the lawsuits at [CBC News](#)

And at the Boston Globe website [www. Boston.com](http://www.Boston.com)

SAFE LEVELS OF BENZENE ?

On the 19th of May 2006 The US Food and Drug Administration carried out tests on a number of soft drinks to access levels of Benzene. This showed some drinks contained high levels of benzene. The report can be seen at the [US Food and Drug Administration website](#).

A number of lawsuits were initiated after this report. The FDA carried out a number of tests on undisclosed brands between 1995 and 2001 and said more test would be carried out.

The USA Environmental Protection Agency states that water must have less than 5 parts per billion (ppb) of benzene to be at safe levels. Independent tests by the lawyers involved in the Coca-Cola "Vault Zero" drink found levels of 13 ppb. In the past levels of over 10 ppb has led to product recalls for Coca-Cola beverages.

WHAT DRINKS MAY BE AFFECTED?

The drinks tested in May 2006 by the US FDA as having high readings for benzene (some over 70 ppb) are listed below. Please check The [FDA website](#) for the full report and list.

Safeway Select Diet Orange,
AquaCal Strawberry Flavoured Water Beverage
Crystal Light Sunrise Classic Orange
Giant Light Cranberry Juice Cocktail

A wesite called www.sourcewatch.org has more information about benzene, and the dangers of drinking soft drinks containing benzene.

The [article Benzene in Soft Drinks](#) is excellent.

The website of the Environmental Working Group www.ewg.org listed a number of soft drinks that contain the chemicals that can, with heat or light form benzene. The actual levels of benzene may or may not be at dangerous levels. The list is below.

- "Country Time Lemonade
- Crystal Light Sunrise Classic Orange
- Diet Pepsi Twist
- Diet Pepsi Vanilla
- Diet RockStar Energy Drink
- Fanta Orange
- Fanta Pineapple
- Fruit20 Plus 10 Natural Apple
- Giant Fruity Punch Cooler
- Hawaiian Punch Fruit Juicy Red
- Hawaiian Punch Lemonade
- Hi-C Blast, Orange Supernova
- Kool-Aid Jammers Blue-Raspberry
- Kool-Aid Jammers Cherry
- Kool-Aid Jammers Grape
- Kool-Aid Jammers Orange
- Lo-Carb Monster Energy
- Monster Energy
- Pepsi Twist Lemon
- RockStar Energy Drink
- Sierra Mist
- Sunkist
-



Sunny D

- Sunny D Baja
- Sunny D Intense Sport Cool Punch
- Sunny D Orange-Fused Strawberry
- Sunny D Smooth
- Sunny D Smooth + Calcium
- Tampico Citrus Punch
- Tampico Grape Punch
- Tampico Tropical Punch
- Tropicana Twister Diet Soda (Diet Orange)
- Tropicana Twister Soda Grape
- Tropicana Twister Soda Orange
- Tropicana Twister Soda Strawberry”

The EWG has corresponded on a number of occasions with the FDA about benzene [click here for a direct link to the letters](#)

If you live in the USA, EWG has a petition to the FDA asking for more information, and forced changes in the ingredients of drinks. [EWG PETITION.](#)

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