

PRESS RELEASE

Government not serious about JPC recommendations

- **Soft drink JPC's recommendations remain unimplemented even after two years**
- **Government's 'Action Taken Report' ignores the real issues and worse – is factually incorrect in places**
- **Only action taken: passing of the buck between ministries**

New Delhi, December 8, 2005: The Union government has done absolutely nothing to implement the recommendations of the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on pesticide residues in and safety standards for soft drinks, fruit juices and other beverages. This has become clear from the Action Taken Report (ATR) submitted in Parliament this week by the Union ministry of health and family welfare.

The ATR proves that almost two years after the JPC submitted its path-breaking report, none of its key recommendations have been translated into any concrete steps or action.

One of the key recommendations of the JPC on fixing “stringent” standards for carbonated beverages has not been implemented. The JPC had observed that “it is prudent to seek complete freedom from pesticide residues in sweetened aerated water”. The ministry’s ATR conveniently notes: “The matter has been referred to the National Level Expert Group to guide Pesticide Residues Sub-Committee of CCFS (Central Committee for Food Standards) for detailed examination and recommendations which is awaited.”

There is no further mention about this “expert group” or about the number of times it has actually met. Says Sunita Narain, director, Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), “This inaction and buck-passing is certainly not acceptable. If the expert group takes such a long time giving its recommendations, how long will the ministry eventually take in issuing the standards?”

The issue of regulating groundwater use faces the same apathy and inaction. In response to the JPC’s recommendation on controlling excessive exploitation of groundwater by industries in the country, the ATR just says: “This relates to the Ministry of Water Resources and that ministry has not informed the action taken status.” The same response is given to the recommendation related to the pricing of groundwater, which is currently being used by industries free of cost.

Similarly, almost all the recommendations related to an overhaul of existing pesticide regulations remain largely unimplemented. For instance, the only ‘action taken’ on the recommendation of building a “database on pesticide residues” is, according to the ATR, this: “The Indian Council for Medical Research is preparing a research project for collection of data.”

“If two years is taken to prepare a research project, how long will it take to actually collect data?” asks Chandra Bhushan, associate director, CSE.

Perhaps the strangest action taken is related to the issue of making non-caffeinated beverages available in India. The JPC had noted that “it is desirable that all brands should include caffeinated and non-caffeinated drinks”. To this, the ATR merely says: “Reply awaited from ministry of industry”. This is a clear misrepresentation of facts: this issue does not fall under the purview of the ministry of industry. It is the ministry of health and the CCFS which are responsible for its resolution.

The ATR points to the fact that the government and its ministries are not serious about implementing the JPC recommendations. This course of ‘inaction’ suggests nothing but a calculated strategy to ignore the real issues and provide a way out for the soft drink companies.

For more details and copies of the ATR, please contact Souparno Banerjee on 011-29955124, 29955125 or 29956394, or write to him at souparno@cseindia.org