

Pesticides in bottled water

An independent study on popular brands warns most are unsafe

Graphic: Neelabh

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Residues of extremely harmful pesticides have been found in popular brands of bottled water sold in Delhi and Mumbai.

The pesticides identified are lindane, DDT, chlorpyrifos and malathion. They collect in the body over the years and cause cancer, attack the nervous system and weaken the immune system.

The study has been conducted by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE). Bottles of water were bought in markets. Raw water samples were taken from some of the units where bottling is done.

In one of the brands, pesticide residues are 104 times higher than the norm prescribed by the European Union. In another, it is 84 times higher. In one sample, the malathion present is 400 times higher than the norm.

The bottled water industry is worth Rs 1,000 crore annually and is growing at 40 per cent as more and more Indians look for safe drinking water. The presence of pesticides in bottled water therefore has huge implications for public health.

CSE examined 17 brands in Delhi and 13 in Mumbai.

This is how the different brands fare: Aquaplus, which is given to railway passengers, is the worst with pesticide at 104 times the safe limit.

Bisleri, the top selling brand, is among the three worst brands with pesticide concentration levels 79 times the EU norm. Coca-Cola's Kinley, which is in close competition with Bisleri, fares poorly with concentration levels 14.6 times higher than the EU-



What the CSE study has found

Residues of pesticides lindane, DDT, chlorpyrifos and melathion in popular brands of bottled water sold in Delhi and Mumbai.

What pesticides do to you

Over the years they cause cancer, nervous disorders and weaken the immune system

Where the water comes from

Most companies draw from deep tubewells

Story of two tests

The Bureau of Indian Standards prescribes a test which does not reveal pesticides. An internationally accepted test by CSE, however, shows high pesticide levels

CSE has posted its findings on the internet at cseindia.org

prescribed levels. Pepsi's Aquafina is better than Kinley, but also above the safe limit. It is followed by Minscot, Prime and Pure Life.

Paras, Bailley, Hello and Kingfisher have a high prevalence of pesticide.

Evian is the best, but almost nobody drinks it because it is entirely imported from France and prohibitively expensive.

Himalayan and Catch, both bottled from spring water in Himachal, are just about safe.

These three brands are categorised as mineral water while the others are called purified bottled water.

Bottled water companies follow the norm set by the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS), which says that pesticide should not be

detectable. It provides a test to establish this. But the test does not show up the pesticide.

CSE conducted the packed column test prescribed by BIS and the capillary column test used elsewhere in the world. The BIS test showed nothing, but the other revealed pesticides.

Where do the pesticides come from?

The water most companies sell is drawn from deep tubewells and is contaminated with pesticides among other things. If the water were to be cleaned through reverse osmosis, it would be totally sterile and demineralised. But this is not done.

When contacted, director (central marks), BIS, O N Srivastava said: "We will study the report. The MRP standards and the procedure for testing are dynamic and can be changed."

Comment: The story bears out what we suspected all along: That even branded mineral water cannot escape our penchant for cutting corners. This is a wake-up call for quality control, and more so in the international year of fresh-water.

BIS norms met, say firms

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New Delhi: Bottled water brands covered under the CSE's study broadly stuck to the point that they meet the norms of BIS, the government body responsible for ensuring quality of water.

According to Coca-Cola (which sells the Kinley brand), pesticide residue in ground water in India

is a national problem. However, the brand meets more than the prescribed requirement of the government.

Bisleri chairman Ramesh Chauhan was not aware of the study. However, he said the brand meets BIS norms. "We don't have pesticide. We don't know what the study is about and how they have done it," Chauhan said.

Pepsi Foods (which sells Aquafina) is also confident of its safety. "We follow WHO prescribed standards. No residual pesticide has ever been detected in the product as per our tests," a Pepsi Foodsofficial said.

Nesle's Pure Life declined to comment. McDowell No 1 echoed the BIS argument. "We conform to BIS norms," a statement said.