

Environmental group finds high levels of carcinogen in Pepsi drinks - even though company promised to change its formula

By Associated Press and daily mail Reporter

An environmental group has revealed that the caramel coloring used in Pepsi still contains a concerning level of a carcinogen, even after the company said it would change its formula.

In March, PepsiCo Inc. and Coca-Cola Co. said they would adjust their formulas across the U.S. after California passed a law ruling drinks with a certain level of carcinogens display a cancer warning.

The chemical is 4-methylimidazole, or 4-Mel, which can form during the cooking process and may subsequently be found in trace amounts in many foods.

Watchdog group The Center for Environmental Health found that while Coke products no longer test positive for the chemical, Pepsi products sold outside of California still do.



Concerns: An environmental group has found that the caramel coloring used in Pepsi still contains a worrisome level of a carcinogen, even after the drink maker said it would change its formula

Pepsi said its caramel coloring suppliers are changing their manufacturing process to cut the amount of 4-Mel in its caramel. That process is complete in California and will be finished in February 2014 in the rest of the country. Pepsi said it will also be taken out globally, but did not indicate a timeline.

Meanwhile, the company said the FDA and other regulatory agencies around the world consider Pepsi's caramel coloring safe.

Coca-Cola said it has transitioned to using a modified caramel in U.S. markets beyond California that does not contain Mel-4, so it wouldn't have to have separate inventory of products for different locations. It also said all of its products, whether they have the modified caramel or not, are safe.

WHAT IS THE CARCINOGEN IN COLA?

Cola's color comes in part from 4-methylimidazole (4-MI), a chemical that forms in the production of caramel food coloring.

Coca-Cola, Pepsi and other manufacturers insist it is safe at the low doses found in drinks.

But studies have shown that long-term exposure to the chemical causes lung cancer in rats, and health officials in California ruled that products with more than 29mcg must carry a health warning.

When research by the Center for Science in the Public Interest, a campaign group, found cans contained nearly 140mcg, all cola companies across the U.S. were forced to cut levels.

Food campaigners say daily consumption of 4-MI at 30mcg would cause cancer in one in 100,000 people over their lifetimes.

But the U.S. Food and Drug Administration says that someone would need to drink more than 1,000 cans of cola every day to reach the levels that caused cancer in lab rats.

The watchdog group Center for Environmental Health said it commissioned Eurofins Analytical laboratory in Metairie, Louisiana, to test Coke and Pepsi products from California in May and from across the country in June. The lab did not find the chemical in California products. And it found no 4-Mel in nine out of 10 Coke products outside of the state.

But it found levels of 4-Mel that are 4 to 8 times higher than California safety levels in all 10 Pepsi products purchased outside California, according to the Center for Environmental Health.

Trace amounts of 4-Mel have not been linked to cancer in humans. The American Beverage Association said that California added the coloring to its list of carcinogens with no studies showing that it causes cancer in humans.

It noted that the listing was based on a single study in lab mice and rats. The Food and Drug Administration has also said that a consumer would have to drink more than 1,000 cans of soda a day to reach the doses administered that have shown links to cancer in rodents. Coca-Cola and PepsiCo account for almost 90 per cent of the soda market, according to industry tracker Beverage Digest.