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Consumer Groups in 20 Countries Urge Coke, Pepsi to Limit Soft Drink Marketing to Children

Cola Promotion in Elementary School Physical Activity Program Cited

WASHINGTON—Consumer organizations in 20 countries today urged the [Coca-Cola](#) Company and [PepsiCo](#) to limit soft drink marketing and help stem the global tide of childhood obesity. The letters are the latest salvo in the [Global Dump Soft Drinks](#) Campaign launched last fall.

The international effort, spearheaded by the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), is being supported by the International Association of Consumer Food Organizations, Corporate Accountability International, the International Baby Food Action Network, and other world-wide consumer networks. Representatives from both Coca-Cola and Pepsi have expressed an interest in meeting with CSPI to discuss the campaign's goals.

Consumer groups around the world have recently launched national campaigns. In New Delhi, the Indian Federation of Consumer Organizations announced a campaign on December 24 (National Consumers Day in India); in Malaysia, the Consumers Association of Penang announced a campaign at a press conference on December 14; and in Stockholm, the Swedish Consumers Coalition commenced a campaign on December 10. National campaigns have also been kicked off in Mexico, Australia, Uganda, and Canada.

“Mexico finds itself in second place in the world, after the United States, in terms of overweight and obesity,” said Alejandro Calvillo, director of the Mexican advocacy organization El Poder del Consumidor, or Consumer Power. “It is not surprising that Mexico also finds itself in second place, after the United States, in the consumption of soft drinks.”

The group, at a press conference in Mexico City on December 10, exposed an [elementary school nutrition campaign](#) sponsored by Coke that portrays Coca-Cola as one of several beverages that can be used for hydration after physical activity. The campaign's organizers are urging consumers around the world to alert them to similarly misleading marketing efforts by Coca-Cola or PepsiCo in other countries.

“Obesity rates in Japan are relatively low but Coca-Cola is promoting sugary teas and other pre-sweetened beverages that threaten traditional dietary patterns,” said Natsuko

Kumasawa, director of the Global Dump Soft Drinks campaign for Japan and East Asia. “We want to stop this trend before more serious problems occur.”

The consumer groups are urging the companies to consistently limit marketing in each of the countries in which they do business. Last year in the U.S., Coke and Pepsi actually supported legislation that would have removed non-diet soft drinks from schools. Coca-Cola has agreed to front-label disclosure of calorie content in Australia. But advances like those are often confined to just one country, in response to national political pressures.

“We want Coca-Cola and Pepsi to adhere to best practices on a world-wide basis. These are global companies and their marketing policies should be consistent around the globe,” said Bruce Silverglade, CSPI director of legal affairs.

The consumer organizations’ letters called on Coca-Cola and PepsiCo to cease all marketing of sugar-laden or caffeinated beverages to children under 16; stop selling sweetened beverages, including sports drinks and non-carbonated fruit-flavored beverages and teas in all public and private elementary, middle, and high schools; prominently display the calorie content per serving on the front labels of containers; include rotating consumer alert messages on the labels of sugary beverages such as “High sugar—drink only occasionally”; and limit sponsorships promoting physical activity and health to blind trusts overseen by government agencies. The letters also called on the companies not to oppose small taxes on soft drinks, the revenues from which could be used for physical activity and nutrition programs. Soft drinks are already taxed in some jurisdictions in the United States and Canada.