Coke and Pepsi Target Children at Schools

Developing countries currently represent the largest growth markets for soft drink producers, as consumption of carbonated soft drinks has leveled off, or slightly declined, in the U.S. and parts of Europe. Consumers in regions such as Latin America, the Middle-East and parts of Asia are being targeted by the soft drink industry with marketing campaigns often affecting children and youth. The soft drink giants like to gain customer allegiance at the earliest possible age, and target children in various environments, including schools.

Carbonated soft drinks (such as Coke and Pepsi) and non-carbonated soft drinks (such as juice drinks diluted with water and sugar, sweetened teas and sports drinks) are often available for students to purchase in vending machines, school shops and at school events. School-affiliated athletic activities and competitions are particularly inappropriate environments at which to distribute or promote soft drinks and other beverages of low nutritional value. Ironically, the Coca-Cola Company actually promotes carbonated soft drinks as a way for students to stay hydrated during and after physical activity. For example, in Mexico, Uruguay and other countries, the Coca-Cola Company promotes regular Coke as a source of hydration, as part of physical activity programs the company designed for elementary school students.

A study commissioned for the soft drink industry by Euro Monitor International, a leading market research firm, surveyed almost two dozen countries in Asia and Central and South America, and found significant increases in carbonated and non-carbonated soft drink sales within the school environment.

Obesity, often beginning in childhood, increases the risk of heart disease, diabetes and other serious illnesses. Excessive consumption of soft drinks could also displace healthier foods and beverages and contribute to nutrient deficiencies. Soft drinks (both diet and non-diet) have also been linked to bone density loss.

What is Being Done?

- Some countries like France, Greece, Japan and the UK have acted to halt the sales of soft drinks on school grounds.

- In the United States and much of Europe, the Coca-Cola Company and PepsiCo, through their industry trade associations, have pledged to curtail the availability of soft drinks in school environments.
Most countries surveyed in a report prepared for the World Heart Federation have weak or non-existent laws restricting the sale of soft drinks in schools.

These various laws and pledges should be harmonized so that school children around the world are assured of receiving healthy beverages during the school day.

**What you Can Do:**

Parents, lawmakers, school officials and healthcare providers, particularly in countries where no regulation exists, need to band together and pressure local bottlers in their countries to distribute only healthful beverages to school students. You can help! More

2 Ibid.


6 In the U.S., the companies entered into an agreement with the Clinton Foundation and the American Heart Association to stop all non-diet carbonated soft drink distribution in elementary, middle and high schools. Beverages in primary schools are limited to water, reasonable servings of 100% fruit juice and low fat milk. Beverages in high schools may also include diet colas unsweetened or diet teas, low calorie sports drinks, fitness waters, flavored waters and/or seltzers containing no more than 10 calories per 8 oz. serving; Light juices and sports drinks equal to or below 66 cal/8 oz; and no less than 50% of beverages should be water and no or low calorie options (10 cal/8oz). [link to Clinton Agreement] In 2007, the companies went even further and publicly agreed to support legislation in the U.S. Congress that would also curtail the distribution of sports drinks at secondary schools. [link to Wall Street Journal article].

7 In Europe, the leading multi-national companies have agreed to some, but not all, of the elements of the program that they agreed to in the United States. Most noteworthy, the soft drink industry’s European pledge is significantly weaker for high schools. It promises only that the companies will provide a variety of beverages to secondary and high school students, including regular carbonated soft drinks.