

When things *don't* go better...

Coca-Cola in the United States has been accused of outright fraud.

Soft drink giant Coca-Cola has been accused of making deceptive and unsubstantiated health claims about its vitaminwater beverages.

According to the American consumer group the Centre for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), the soft-drinks giant has made a range of claims about vitaminwater that go beyond those allowed by the Food and Drug Administration.

The CSPI says vitaminwater is marketed as a healthful alternative to soda by the use of health buzz words 'defence,' 'rescue', 'energy' and 'endurance' on the labelling and they have issued a class action lawsuit against the company about the matter.

The CSPI says the company also claims the drinks reduce the risk of chronic disease and eye disease, promote healthy joints and support immune function, when in fact the 33g of sugar in each bottle of the product do more to promote obesity, diabetes and other health problems than the vitamins in the drinks do to perform the advertised benefits listed on the bottles.

Coca-Cola has dismissed the suit as ridiculous but the CSPI says it hopes the company will change its marketing practices and would like to see consumers reimbursed.

According to the CSPI, the vitaminwater labels' claims cross the line and are an outright fraud.

CSPI says vitaminwater contains between 0% to 1% juice, even though the full names of the drinks include "endurance peach mango" and "focus kiwi strawberry" and "xxx blueberry pomegranate acai" - even though the group claims that the products contain no blueberry, pomegranate, or acai juice.

The other juices contain no cranberry, grapefruit, dragon fruit, peach, mango, kiwi, or strawberry juice.

Company responds

In its response to the lawsuit, Coca-Cola says in a statement on their website: "This is a ridiculous and ludicrous lawsuit. Glacéau vitaminwater is a ... hydrating beverage with essential vitamins and water, with labels showing calorie content.

"Filing a lawsuit is an opportunistic PR stunt. This is not about protecting the public interest. This is about grandstanding at a time when CSPI is receiving very little attention. There is no surprise that one week before the inauguration of the US President, with the flurry of activity in Washington, D.C., that CSPI has chosen today to try to bring attention to themselves".

The company statement says "We don't need a 'healthful' alternative to sodas" and goes on to say that consumers today are aware and are looking for more from their beverages than just hydration. The company says consumers can readily see the nutrition facts panels on every bottle of glacéau vitaminwater, which show what's in the product and what's not.

This latest lawsuit comes just weeks after the company was warned by US health regulators about the way markets another product.

The company was criticised by the FDA in December over claims that Diet Coke Plus included a variety of vitamins and minerals, which was a violation of US policy against marketing soda and other snack foods as more nutritious.

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