

One bad apple juice don t spoil the whole bunch, girl

By ACSH Staff — December 1, 2011

We thought the arsenic in apple juice scare had ended up in the unfounded scares graveyard, but headlines in today s news took us by surprise. In a revival of this juice scare, *Consumer Reports* has announced that about 10 percent of the samples of apple and grape juice that they tested had levels of [arsenic exceeding federal standards](#) [1] for drinking water.

This follows on the heels of a widely discredited piece by Dr. Mehmet Oz, host of *The Dr. Oz Show* , who claimed in September that some apple juice contained excessive levels of arsenic. Scientists quickly pointed out that Dr. Oz had not distinguished between organic and inorganic arsenic an important distinction, because organic arsenic is considered to be non-toxic. The FDA responded with a statement explaining that most of the arsenic in apple juice comes in the harmless organic form; the agency and other experts called Dr. Oz s report irresponsible and misleading for creating hype and fear around a perfectly safe product.

Nevertheless, Consumers Union (CU), the advocacy section of *Consumer Reports*, decided to investigate the issue further, and tested 88 samples of apple and grape juice to distinguish between organic and inorganic arsenic. Since there are no current standards for arsenic in juice, they employed FDA standards set for bottled water under 10 parts per billion (ppb). According to CU s investigation, beyond finding that some samples contained arsenic levels above this limit, the majority of the arsenic found was in fact in the inorganic form, contrary to what the FDA had asserted back in September. Inorganic arsenic in high levels has been linked to negative health effects such as bladder, lung, and skin cancer, cardiovascular disease, and type 2 diabetes, so this particular finding led Consumers Union to call upon the FDA to set and enforce arsenic standards for juice.

The media, of course, took this as an opportunity to report on the dangers of fruit juices and as new proof that Dr. Oz was right. The FDA as well has reported that, on the basis of this study, they will be increasing surveillance and reviewing what needs to be done to reduce arsenic exposure. But ACSH s Dr. Elizabeth Whelan is concerned that the FDA s sudden reversal may set off needless anxiety among parents; she questions the agency's decision to reverse its initial stance on the basis of what she considers a dubious study.

ACSH s Dr. Ruth Kava agrees that this small study, which has not been peer-reviewed, has been taken out of context. They are jumping to a conclusion that will affect millions of people, all based on one non-peer-reviewed study, she says. As ACSH advisor Dr. Allison Muller points out, Further analyses of these data are needed before we can say that the amount of inorganic arsenic found in these foods is enough to cause any of the supposed health risks.

Beyond the extremely preliminary nature of the Consumers Union s study, there is in fact evidence suggesting that, even if arsenic levels are higher than thresholds set for water, they are still

unlikely to be harmful at all. For instance, it is possible that arsenic levels in juices can be safe at higher levels than in drinking water, of which people consume more. And an [analysis of arsenic safety in water](#) [2], co-authored by ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross, reports that arsenic levels even several times higher than FDA standards still pose no risk to health. While the levels may or may not be above the guidelines, the actual health risk from consuming apple juice is zero, Dr. Ross concludes.

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[1] <http://www.medpagetoday.com/PrimaryCare/DietNutrition/29943>

[2] <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12460751>