A few years ago, my mother gave me a Christmas present (nice Jewish family, right?). I had no idea what it was, and I was a bit puzzled by the package — a plain cardboard box with the following on the label: **WARNING: This product contains chemicals known to the State of California to cause cancer and birth defects or other reproductive harm.** This got me wondering why my mother would get me weapons-grade uranium as a gift. After all, I've been a pretty good son, and I don't remember asking for any. Then again, the package was too light, so I ruled that out pretty quickly. But, what could be in there? A plastic bird house.

If you're wondering why a box containing a bird house requires a Proposition 65 (1) warning label, you are not alone. But, if you live in California, you won't even notice it. Proposition 65 stickers are everywhere: hotel rooms, restaurants, automobile showrooms, art supply stores, supermarkets, parking garages, hardware stores, Starbucks, and on beaches. But not on your penis.

That would actually make some sense scientifically. More on that later. California is required to periodically update the Prop 65 list. The most recent list [1] was published on May 20, and now contains 952 chemicals. Some of them make sense (tobacco smoke, benzene, asbestos, and arsenic), but some clearly do not.

For example, Valium is on the list. Let's say that you are haunted by an obsessive fear of getting cancer, and your doctor writes you a prescription for Valium. Isn't the label going to screw with...
your head? The list contains these too: codeine, gasoline, tetracycline, aspirin, nickel, birth control pills, alcohol, and Chinese-style salted fish. Also, you'll find pyridine (one of the chemicals in coffee), orange oil and wood dust. Which suggests, at the very least, that one should not drink coffee while doing carpentry that requires an orange finish.

So, why shouldn't California slap a label on your penis? It is far more likely to cause cancer than coffee, alcohol, or gasoline. Men develop 3-4 million cases \(^2\) of genital warts per year. The human papilloma virus (HPV) is the cause of the warts. Several strains of HPV are known to cause cervical cancer (as well as cancers of the anus, vagina, penis, and throat). There are more than 30,000 new HPV-related cancers \(^3\) every year, and a good number of these are caused by penises.

Yet, coffee, which causes approximately zero cancers every year is on the Prop 65 list, while the male appendage is not. Illogical, and possibly even discriminatory. Something needs to be done! Perhaps a public campaign. Since public campaigns need a catchy slogan, here's my entry: "Stick it out for a sticker." Can you do better? Let's have a contest! Winner gets a doubly-awesome, free ACSH coffee mug, giving you the opportunity to enjoy your carcinogenic coffee in style.

![Image of coffee mug]  

Come on guys. Do your worst!

**Note:** (1) Proposition 65, which is officially titled "The Safe Drinking Water and Toxic Enforcement Act of 1986," originally was well intended; it was drafted to stop pollutants from being discharged into water. It has since been subverted by predatory trial lawyers \(^4\), who will sue companies for failing to disclose any potentially "harmful" chemicals in their products. Whether the chemicals are really harmful or not makes little difference. Now, companies are forced to label anything that is made in the state. This makes the label meaningless. Labeling everything is the same as labeling nothing. The law is now a joke, but it is a bad joke. Just like my title.

**Update June 6:** OK, the madness may stop. We have a winner: "Warning: Chemicals found in this organ have been known to cause birth." Thanks to Ron Sullivan. The mug shall be yours!