



Health groups slam Coca-Cola for misleading consumers

Soft-drink giant Coca-Cola will be required to set the record straight and correct any potentially misleading impressions given by their "Myth Busting" campaign.

Peak health groups have heralded the announcement by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) as a wake up call for junk food manufacturers who hide behind marketing spin to suggest their products are not unhealthy.

The ACCC has announced that it considered the advertising was likely to be misleading and deceptive and is requiring the company to take various actions to remedy this, such as through corrective advertising in major newspapers.

The action taken by the ACCC relates to Coca-Cola's 'myth-busting' advertising campaign, featuring popular actress Kerry Armstrong, which appeared in newspapers, magazines and on-line late last year.

Senior Policy Advisor at the Obesity Policy Coalition (OPC), Ms Jane Martin, said the action taken by the ACCC to bring Coca-Cola to account is a major victory for Australian consumers.

"Coca-Cola, in an attempt to reach the 'mum-market', tried to soothe concerns about the unhealthy aspects of their products, but this has back-fired."

"The myth-busting campaign created the overall impression that 'Coca-Cola' is not unhealthy, yet this is a product that contains about 8 teaspoons of sugar in a standard can and has no intrinsic health benefit."

"Coca-Cola's promotion points clearly to a need for better food labelling so food and drinks can be seen for what they are, rather than allowing marketing spin to dress them up as something that they are not."

President of the Australian Dental Association, Dr Neil Hewson, noted that frequent consumption of acidic, soft drinks has been a key factor in the deteriorating dental health of Australian children.

"When you consider the disturbing fact that almost a quarter of Victorian children aged 2-12 drink more soft drink than water, it's

vital that no parent is hoodwinked into thinking Coca-Cola is not an unhealthy product."

"People have a right to accurate information about the products they buy, especially when the consumption of sugary, fizzy drinks is likely to contribute substantially to Australia's escalating childhood obesity epidemic and cause significant dental health problems," said Dr Hewson.

Ms Martin said the Coca-Cola campaign attempted to correct so-called 'myths' about Coke but instead the campaign had the potential to mislead the public.

"Put simply, Coca-Cola consumers should not be led to believe that Coke is a healthy product. It contains high amounts of sugar, calories and caffeine and provides no valuable nutrition."

"The onus should be on companies to act responsibly and not mislead consumers especially when something as important as the health of children is at stake," said Ms Martin.

The Parents Jury member Jacqi Deighan expressed relief that the truth about Coca-Cola will be exposed.

"In the ad Coca-Cola used Kerry Armstrong's status as a celebrity mum to talk directly to other mothers and influence how they feel about purchasing Coke for their children. They claimed to bust the myths around Coca-Cola but now it's their potentially misleading statements that have been truly busted," said Ms Deighan.

The OPC, together with The Parents Jury and the Australian Dental Association, made a complaint drawing the Commission's attention to conduct by the company which it considered to be in breach of the Trade Practices Act 1974, and to request the Commission take appropriate action against the company.

Recorded audio grabs of Dr Neil Hewson and Jane Martin are available for download from the OPC website, www.opc.org.au

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ACCC media release:

<http://www.accc.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/867233/fromItemId/142>

The Obesity Policy Coalition (OPC) is a partnership between the Cancer Council Victoria, Diabetes Australia - Victoria, VicHealth and the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention at Deakin University. See www.opc.org.au.