

Gatorade to Remove Controversial Ingredient

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NEW YORK (AP) — PepsiCo Inc. is removing a controversial ingredient from its Gatorade sports drink in response to customer complaints.

Molly Carter, a spokeswoman for the company, said Friday that the removal of brominated vegetable oil was in the works over the past year after the company began "hearing rumblings" from consumers about the ingredient. She said it wasn't a reaction to a recent petition on Change.org by a Mississippi teenager.

The ingredient is also used in other drinks, including some flavors of Powerade made by rival Coca-Cola Co. The Atlanta-based company did not say whether it would remove the ingredient from Powerade as well but noted that it takes customer concerns into account when looking for ways to improve its drinks.

Ingredients in food and drinks have come under greater scrutiny in recent years, helped by the ability of consumers to mobilize online. The petition on Change.org noted that brominated vegetable oil has been patented as a flame retardant and is banned in Japan and the European Union. It had more than 200,000 supporters Friday.

For Gatorade, Carter said the ingredient is used as an "emulsifier," meaning it distributes flavoring evenly so that it doesn't collect at the surface. She said it was used only in select varieties including orange and "citrus cooler." Other drinks that use brominated vegetable oil, or BVO, include Coca-Cola's Fanta and PepsiCo's Mountain Dew.

A spokesman for competitor Dr Pepper Snapple Group said Sun Drop and Squirt are among its drinks that have BVO.

Carter noted that the ingredient is not banned by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and that PepsiCo's decision wasn't the result of any health or safety concerns. She said it was specifically a response to concerns expressed by Gatorade customers. The company's decision was first reported by the trade journal Beverage Digest.

Pulin Modi, a spokesman for Change.org, said the move reflects the "shift in power we're seeing between businesses and their customers."

Sarah Kavanagh, the 15-year-old who posted the petition in November, said she's "very, very happy" that Gatorade is making the change. Kavanagh said she used to drink Gatorade frequently before she checked the ingredients to see if it was in line with her vegan diet. When she looked up brominated vegetable oil online, she didn't like what she found.

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Now that the ingredient is being removed, she said she'll likely go back to drinking Gatorade. Kavanagh also taped a segment on the topic for The Dr. Oz Show this week that is set to air Wednesday.

PepsiCo, based in Purchase, N.Y., is replacing the BVO in Gatorade with an ingredient called sucrose acetate isobutyrate, which Carter said will maintain the flavor and taste of the drinks.

Although Americans have been drinking less soda since 1998, sports drinks have remained a growth area for PepsiCo and Coca-Cola. Gatorade remains the dominant player with about 69 percent of the market, while Powerade has 30 percent, according to Beverage Digest.

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