Nesquik strawber pulled from super

WHAT gives Nesquik Strawberry its bright pink colour? A combination of two synthetic red food dyes – Ponceau 4R (E124) and erythrosine (E127).

The former appeared in this column last week, as it's one of six colourants found in a UK study to aggravate behavioural problems in children.

The European Parliament last month took swift action in response to that study, agreeing that food manufacturers in Europe who choose to use one or more of the dyes will have to put warnings on those products by 2010.

It will read: "May have an adverse effect on activity and attention in children".

The other five are tartrazine (E102), quinoline yellow (E104), sunset yellow (E110), carmoisine (E122 and allura red (E129).

Not on that list is the red colourant called erythrosine. But it recently gave food giant Nestle SA reason to blush, because according to SA's regulations relating to food colourants, erythrosine is not allowed to be used in a product like Nesquik – and it's been quietly lurking in Nesquik Strawberry for years.

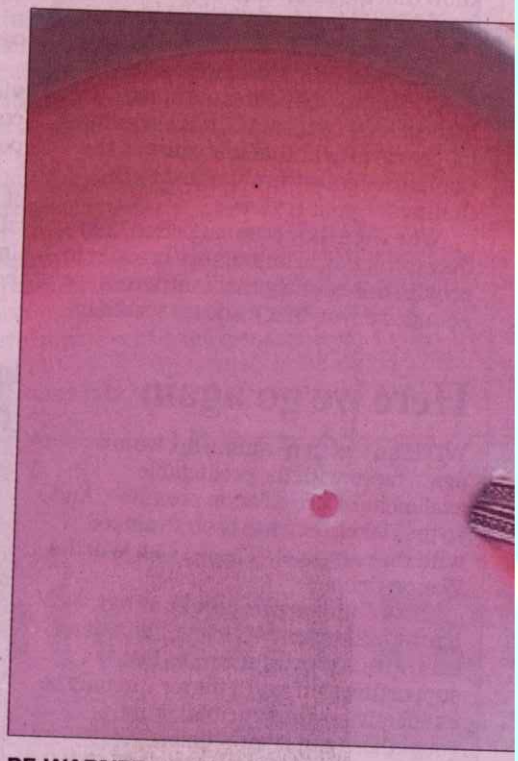
At the Department of Health's request, all packs of Nesquik Strawberry were quietly withdrawn from shops across the country earlier this month.

The company is working on a natural alternative to erythrosine and the reformulated Nesquik Strawberry should appear on supermarket shelves in October.

So what's the story here?

Well, according to Dries Pretorius of the national Department of Health, the government was tipped off about the presence of erythrosine in the product by the European Food Safety Authority, when a batch was exported to a European country.

"This department immediately followed up with Nestle and it was established that the company misinterpreted the South African regulations related to colourants permissible in foodstuffs, and agreed to institute a company recall up to and including retail level in South Africa."



BE WARNED: A red colourant called erythrosi effect on activity and attention in children.

I have to say it's hard to imagine how the misinterpretation could have happened.

The Regulations Relating to Food Colourants – easily available on the internet – are very clear. Annexure 4 – "colourants permitted for certain uses only" – declares that erythrosine may only be used in sugar confectionery, cocktail and candied cherries, cherries in syrup and cherries in fruit cocktails, raw or unprocessed meats and processed meat.

Why so few foods?

Because the joint Food & Agriculture Organisation/ World Health Organisation's expert committee on food additives has allocated a "very low" acceptable daily intake to erythrosine, Pretorius said.

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