CA Passover Diners Get the Word: No Coke

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Coca-Cola may be off the menu for the Passover feast — at least in California.

As millions of Jews celebrate the Biblical story of the exodus from Egypt on Friday night, Coke says it's been forced out of California by state laws on toxic chemicals.

Coke directed its suppliers last year to change the way they manufacture caramel to reduce levels of the chemical 4-methylimidazole, or 4-MEI, which California has listed as a carcinogen.

Although the manufacturing changes didn't affect the formula or the taste, the resulting product doesn't meet Jewish dietary laws for Passover, the company said.

As a result, the company announced that it will not offer "kosher for Passover" products in California until 2013.

Passover feasts are better known for ritual wine-drinking, but sodas can be included, although many observant Jews will not use products made with corn during Passover.

Although most Coca-Cola uses corn syrup sweetener, the Passover version is made with sugar.

A Cokeless Passover is disappointing, said Jason Moss, executive director of the Jewish Federation of the Greater San Gabriel and Pomona Valleys.

"I think it would be wonderful for the community to be able to drink a Coke and have a smile," he told the Pasadena Star-News.

For those who can't do without a dose of bubbly brown sweetness, there may be hope. Some kosher stores have stocked Passover Coke from other states.

And there's always Pepsi. As usual, the company is offering its sugar-based Pepsi Throwback, which uses real sugar and is acceptable for Passover, spokeswoman Andrea Canabal said.

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