

Lawsuit: Calif. wines contain dangerous arsenic levels

By Ben O'Donnell, Wine Spectator

Are some California wineries “secretly poisoning wine consumers”? That’s one of the incendiary charges being leveled in a class-action lawsuit against several of the biggest companies in American wine, filed March 19 in a California state court. At the heart of the suit is that the “defendants produce, manufacture and/or distribute wine in California that contains inorganic arsenic in amounts far in excess of what is allowed in drinking water.”

The spokesman for one company named in the suit and others in the industry argue that the lawsuit is spurious and based on misinformation.

The plaintiffs “decided to file a complaint based on misleading and selective information in order to defame responsible California winemakers, create unnecessary fear, and distort and deceive the public for their own financial gain,” said a spokesman for The Wine Group (TWG), one of the defendants.

The lawsuit names several large companies, including TWG, Treasury Wine Estates, Trinchero, Fetzer Vineyards and Bronco, following claims that a Denver laboratory found inorganic arsenic in 83 brands, including Franzia, Sutter Home, Concannon, Wine Cube, Beringer, Flipflop, Fetzer, Korbel, Almaden, Trapiche, Cupcake, Smoking Loon and Charles Shaw.

“Almost all of them are \$10 or less, and the vast majority of those are under \$5,” said lawyer Brian Kabateck, whose firm is one of three bringing the suit, at a press conference today after the complaint was filed in the Superior Court of California’s Los Angeles branch. “The consumer may be spending

less than \$5 for a bottle of wine, but they may be paying with their health in the long run. These are very serious allegations that we're raising against the wine industry."

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