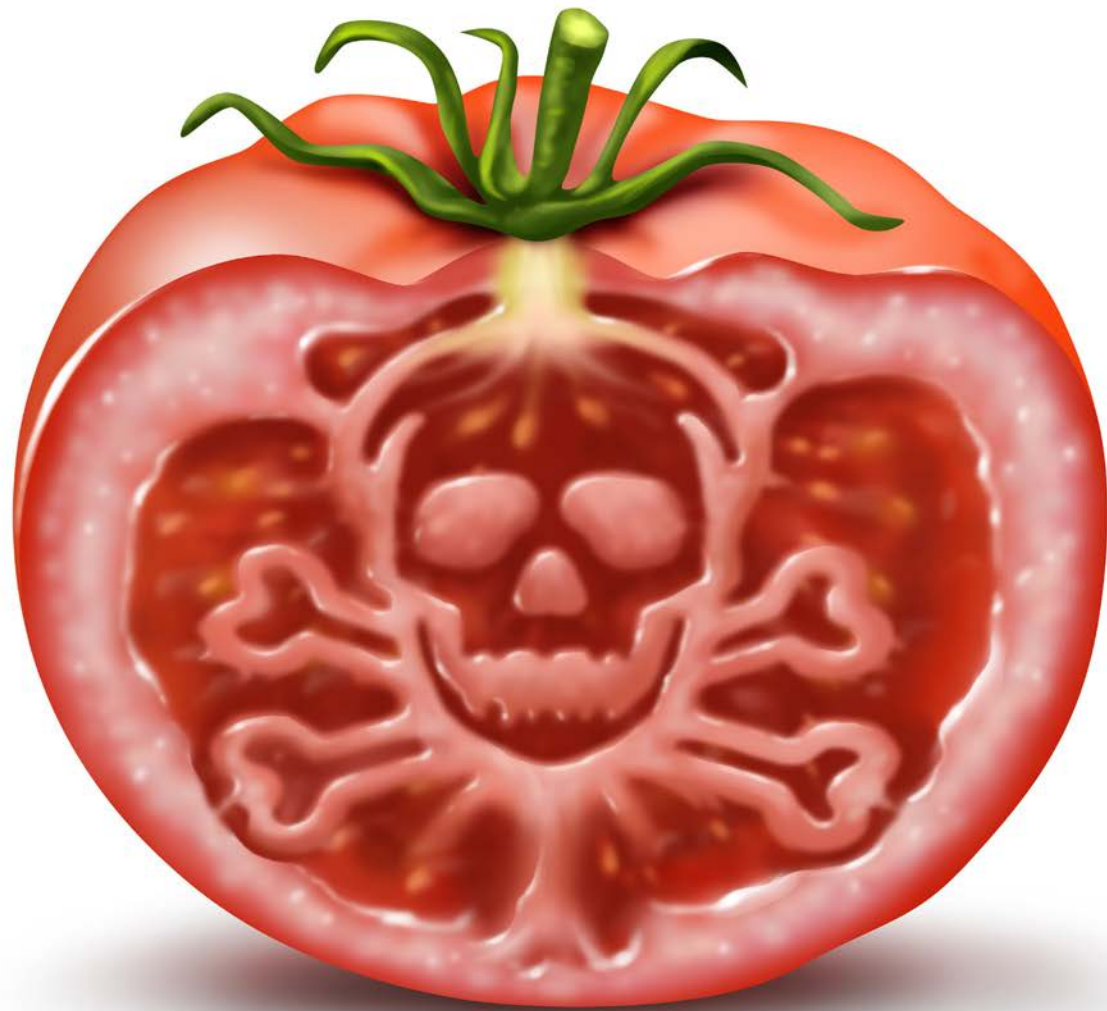




AT RISK



HYDROFARM, SUNLIGHT SUPPLY, GENERAL HYDROPONICS, DUTCH MASTER: PUTTING YOU AT RISK?

BY CHRIS JEFFERSON

I'm here in my hydroponics indoor grow room looking at all the grow equipment and supplies I have that are made or sold by Hydrofarm, and am very sorry to have to tell you that Hydrofarm—one of North America's major providers of hydroponics equipment—is also one of several hydroponics companies creating safety risks for connoisseur hydroponics growers.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S.-based Hydrofarm just paid a \$316,000 fine for selling two "unlicensed pesticides" to hydroponics growers.

The government's description of the two products as "unlicensed pesticides" is confusing, because one of them is hydrogen peroxide (H₂O₂) and the other is sulfur, but that's how the government often classifies potentially harmful products used in hydroponics gardening.

It isn't the exact same way you and I use the word "pesticide," that's for sure, but it's true that both products are designed to kill something. H₂O₂ is for killing harmful microbes; sulfur is for killing powdery mildew. So maybe that's what the EPA means when they call them "pesticides."

What Hydrofarm did wrong, according to EPA, was to sell two products that had the potential to harm growers without properly informing growers about the potential harms.

The products were "Nutralife Plant Products H₂O₂," along with a sulfur product. You use H₂O₂ in grow rooms when you want to cleanse grow equipment and water reservoirs. You also use it to add oxygen to your plants' root zone (adding oxygen to the root zone promotes root health and plant growth, and there are ways to do that other than by using H₂O₂).

Unfortunately, hydrogen peroxide kills beneficial microbes such as those found in Voodoo Juice, Tarantula, and Piranha. Beneficial microbes strengthen and protect roots so your plants are healthier and intake nutrients faster.

But sometimes you have bad microbes or other evils in your root zone and/or

hydroponics reservoir, so you may choose to use H₂O₂ or some other sterilizing agent to prevent catastrophic rotting of your roots and other water-borne problems.

Problem is, H₂O₂ in high concentrations (Nutralife H₂O₂ is 29% hydrogen peroxide) is dangerous for humans, unless you know how to use it "properly."

The EPA said Hydrofarm failed to provide full safety and use instructions for the H₂O₂ product it was selling. This meant

"THE EPA SAYS IT UNCOVERED THESE HYDROPONICS PRODUCT PROBLEMS AFTER RECEIVING INFORMATION FROM STATE FERTILIZER AND PESTICIDE REGULATORS."

growers could unknowingly have used the product in ways that causes damage to skin, eyes, and the respiratory system, even leading to potential death.

Sulfur is used in sulfur burners. When you have powdery mildew in a grow room or greenhouse, sulfur burning is the most effective way to stop it.

However, sulfur is a potentially hazardous substance inert or burned; the EPA said Hydrofarm didn't provide proper warnings about using the sulfur it was selling.

The EPA says it uncovered these hydroponics product problems after receiving information from state fertilizer and pesticide regulators.

Hydrofarm responded to the allegations by paying the fine and removing the products from its inventory. It claimed it didn't know the products were harmful because it had received safety assurances from the product manufacturers.

This is one of a series of product safety problems that the hydroponics industry has seen recently.

Hydrofarm and Sunlight Supply (another major hydroponics equipment wholesaler-distributor) have been tagged by government agencies for selling hydroponics bloom boosters that contain potentially-dangerous plant growth regulators (PGRs) such as PACLO (Paclobutrazol) and Daminozide.

These products are used to limit plants' vertical growth, and to promote higher-density flowers. They're safe for ornamental crops, but not for crops you consume.

That's why California regulators ordered Hydrofarm and Sunlight Supply to stop selling bloom boosters such as Top Load, Flower Dragon, and Phosphoload, citing harms caused by mislabeled products that may contain PGRs. These products made by companies like Dutch Master, Emerald Triangle, and other companies are potentially harmful to our community, regulators say.

Sunlight Supply and Hydrofarm reportedly still sell products containing potentially-dangerous PGRs, such as General Hydroponics Bush Load, which contain PACLO and/or other PGRs.

And you're likely to find it interesting that RosebudMag.com reported on Sunlight Supply irrigation tubing that a California hydroponics grower claimed was responsible for leaking toxic substances that destroyed his crops.

Sunlight Supply didn't handle the grower's complaint in a friendly way, sources say, and the grower later reported that Sunlight Supply's actions had not just



harmed his valuable hydroponics plants but had also stolen away his money and freedom.

The basic message we get from all this dire information is hydroponics growers have to be way more careful about what hydroponics products we buy, and what we know about them.

Distribution companies like Sunlight Supply and Hydrofarm, along with manufacturers like General Hydroponics, don't always get it right when it comes to ensuring our safety.

In fact, when I called the major hydroponics manufacturers to ask them about product safety, plant growth regulators, and related topics, the only company that would talk to me was Advanced Nutrients. Their technical expert assured me that none of the Advanced Nutrients product contain these harmful compounds, and that their flower-boosting products have been government-tested and certified as safe for use on consumable crops.

I don't meant to sound like I hate Sunlight Supply, Hydrofarm, or General Hydroponics...because I don't.

I understand the huge logistical challenges that distributors like Hydrofarm and Sunlight Supply face when trying to figure out if every product they sell is safe for consumable connoisseur crops.

They're stocking lots of inventory, and it's hard to monitor all product risk factors, especially when hydroponics manufacturers aren't providing all necessary details about risk potentials.

When you hear about PACLO health warnings, it is rather troubling that General Hydroponics continues to make and market an off-label PACLO product.

You can easily see why hydroponics growers are wondering if these massive hydroponics companies are more interested in profits than they are in protecting our health.

So be sure to ask your hydroponics retailers and manufacturers to tell you everything that's in hydroponics products you're considering buying...especially any potentially harmful ingredients. You also want to get usage and application instructions that minimize risk to you as a hydroponics grower and plant consumer! ☺