

NEWS RELEASE:



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Bug fighter battles back

Powerful disinfectant used to stop spread of Norwalk virus

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The explosive spread of the Norwalk virus has become big business for a Mississauga chemical company.

When infection control specialists at hospitals and on cruise ships look for something to clean up the mess Norwalk leaves behind, they turn to Virox Technologies.

Virox, led by company president Randy Pilon, has developed what it says is an environmentally friendly, safe, high-powered cleaning solution called accelerated hydrogen peroxide.

A powerful disinfectant, AHP has become a germ fighter on many fronts - the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has sanctioned AHP as an effective decontaminant against anthrax and Health Canada has approved its use to combat outbreaks of Norwalk. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also lists the cleaner as a way to get rid of Norwalk.

The success of Pilon's cleaner has made his company one of Canada's hottest start-ups, according to *PROFIT* magazine. Revenues shot up from \$787,000 in 1999, a year after the company opened its doors, to \$3.2 million in 2001. A staff of 15 works in Virox's 14,000-square-foot Mississauga warehouse-headquarters.

The patented technology of AHP is being used in everything from wipes used to mop up cruise ships hit with Norwalk, to hand sanitizers and disinfectants for farm equipment.

AHP is a chemical mix of substances that are "generally regarded as safe" by the Environmental Protection Agency, said Pilon. When the mix is added to peroxide, it accelerates the germicidal activity.

Pilon hopes his product will one day be found in cleaners all over the world. He may be getting closer to that goal; Virox's clients include Bayer and Johnson Diversey, the makers of Windex and Pledge.

Hospitals across southern Ontario have been battling the Norwalk virus for the past few months. A highly contagious pathogen, Norwalk is easily passed from person to person. The bug brings on diarrhea, vomiting and stomach cramps that can last up to 48 hours.



Randy Pilon, president of Mississauga's Virox Technologies, says demand for his firm's special germ-fighting solution has jumped as hospitals and cruise ships work to fend off the Norwalk virus and other contaminants. Called accelerated hydrogen peroxide, the disinfectant is environmentally friendly and safe, Pilon says.

Norwalk hit many hospitals hard, forcing some to shut down emergency rooms, patient units and cancel surgeries.

But for Pilon, Norwalk has meant big business. "I don't think there is a hospital in Canada that isn't using our technology," he said. "We've seen the ready-to-use (products) and wet wipes skyrocket because of the outbreaks."

The face cloth-sized wipes are the preferred method of cleaning for many cruise ships because there is no smell with Virox products, said Pilon. Late last year, both Holland America and Disney Cruise Line fought Norwalk after hundreds of people became ill.

Diane Weinwurm, an infection control practitioner at Toronto's Trillium Health Centre, said the hospital has used Virox's products for the past few years.

"It's used routinely in high-risk areas," she said, pointing out Trillium has managed to avoid the Norwalk-related shutdowns other hospitals have experienced.

Mount Sinai Hospital, the University Health Network and the Hospital for Sick Children also use Virox, added Pilon.

According to the Ontario health ministry, the spread of Norwalk has slowed and the ministry stopped tracking it in mid-December.

"The volume has dropped off dramatically," said spokesperson John Letherby. "The daily reporting through our regional offices petered out around the holiday period."