
FACT SHEET

Products Containing Living Micro-Organisms

What are micro-organisms?

Micro-organisms are microscopic forms of life like bacteria, microscopic fungi and yeasts.

What kinds of products contain living micro-organisms?

Because micro-organisms are capable of decomposing various materials, including petroleum, grease and many toxic compounds, they are used in many products in the Canadian market, notably in septic tank starters, compost starters, detergents, odour-control products, and drain cleaners/degreasers.

Some examples of terminology on packaging to indicate that a product may contain micro-organisms are:

- “environmentally friendly bacteria”
- “naturally occurring micro-organisms”

Should Canadians be concerned about the use of these products?

Micro-organisms used in these types of products are usually already present in the environment and do not normally cause disease or illness in healthy individuals and in most animals and plants.

Some of these types of products may contain significantly higher concentrations of micro-organisms relative to levels normally encountered in nature. As well, some micro-organisms in these products may pose a risk to certain animals or people (for example, those with weakened or less robust immune systems, such as infants and the elderly).

How can Canadians better protect themselves?

You should follow package directions. Basic hygiene, such as regular hand washing, and avoiding contact with the eyes and mouth, is an effective way to reduce the risks associated with handling products containing living micro-organisms. Using gloves or other protective clothing is another good way to reduce contact with these products.

What is the Government of Canada doing?

Under the *New Substances Notification Regulations (Organisms)*, which have been in place since September 1, 1997, any person wishing to import or manufacture living micro-organisms may be required to notify the Government of Canada about these substances. In order to protect the health of Canadians and the environment, Health Canada and

Environment Canada then jointly assess the potential human health and environmental risks of all new living micro-organisms with environmental applications before they are introduced into Canadian commerce.

In parallel, Environment Canada and Health Canada have initiated the assessment of risk to the environment and human health posed by living organisms that were in commerce in Canada before 1986 and that have not yet been assessed.

More information on these initiatives can be found at http://www.ec.gc.ca/substances/nsb/eng/home_e.shtml.

Contact Information:

New Substances Notification Information Line

Environment Canada

Place Vincent Massey, 14th Floor

Gatineau, QC K1A 0H3

Telephone: (800) 567-1999 (Toll-free in Canada)

(819) 953-7156 (Outside of Canada)

Fax: (819) 953-7155

E-mail: nsn-infoline@ec.gc.ca

Web: http://www.ec.gc.ca/substances/nsb/eng/home_e.shtml