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Foam gets its shot at anthrax

Jessica Gorman

A recently developed chemical cocktail that kills anthrax spores and breaks down chemical warfare agents has received its first real-world trials in anthrax cleanups this past month.

The substance, often formulated as a foam, can also be a fog or mist, says Cecelia Williams of Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque, N.M., where the foam was developed. The brew contains chemicals similar to surfactants in hair conditioner and oxidizers in toothpaste, and it offers an alternative to other cleanup chemicals, such as chlorine dioxide gas.

Laboratory tests and military field trials have shown that the cocktail kills anthrax spores. After the surfactants soften a spore's outer coating, the oxidizers get inside the bacterium and break it down, says Williams.

Cleanup crews have used a brand of the foam sold by Denver-based Modec in the offices of ABC, CBS, and the New York Post, says Modec president Brian Kalamanka. A version sold by EnviroFoam in Huntsville, Ala., has been used in parts of three congressional office buildings, an EnviroFoam spokesperson says.



A researcher sprays decontamination foam.

Sandia National Laboratories

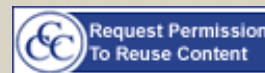
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