

Recent news media reports have linked asbestos with vermiculite mined from a closed W.R. Grace mine in Libby, Montana.

Sun Gro Horticulture Canada, Ltd., manufactures potting mixes that contain vermiculite and sells Strong Lite vermiculite for industrial uses. We have tested our vermiculite and found it to meet all government safety standards. The following is a series of questions and answers relating to vermiculite and asbestos.

Q. What is Vermiculite?

A. Vermiculite is a naturally occurring mined ore that expands (exfoliates) when heated to approximately 1200° F.

Q. How is expanded vermiculite used?

A. Vermiculite is used in many horticultural potting mixes and has a number of industrial applications, such as insulation and other construction uses.

Q. Does Sun Gro Horticulture use vermiculite?

A. Yes, some of Sun Gro's potting mixes contain exfoliated vermiculite. Sun Gro also produces exfoliated vermiculite for industrial customers.

Q. Where does the Sun Gro vermiculite come from?

A. Sun Gro purchases vermiculite ore or expanded vermiculite from several sources---American Vermiculite (sourced from the Palabora mine in South Africa) Thermorock Co., W.R. Grace, Virginia Vermiculite and the Schundler Corp.

Q. Have Sun Gro/Strong Lite industrial products ever used vermiculite ore or exfoliated vermiculite from the Libby, Montana mine?

A. No, Strong Lite vermiculite has been produced since 1957 and has never been sourced from the Libby Montana mine.

Q. Is Vermiculite the same as Asbestos?

A. No. Vermiculite is not asbestos. The vermiculite giving rise to media concerns about its asbestos content was extracted from a mine in Libby, Montana that is now closed.

Q. What is asbestos?

A. Asbestos is also a naturally occurring mineral. At one time it was valued for its use in a number of fire proofing applications.

Q. Why is asbestos bad?

A. *If large quantities of asbestos fibers are breathed in, they can lodge in the lungs. The disease “asbestosis” may develop.*

Q. How much asbestos is a “safe” level?

A. *The OSHA “safe” level for workers is 0.1% by weight (one tenth of 1 percent) or 1,000 ppm (parts per million) (2001). The EPA has not established a “Reference Dose” for asbestos.*

Q. Do Sun Gro’s vermiculite and potting mixes meet government “safe” levels?

A. *Yes. Sun Gro only purchases vermiculite from companies that test their products and certify that the vermiculite passes government safety levels. Sun Gro also arranges for its own testing of both its vermiculite ore and expanded vermiculite, to be sure our customers and employees are not exposed to asbestos levels that exceed government standards.*

Q. Why is vermiculite used in potting mixes?

A. *In a potting medium, vermiculite provides good aeration, improves water-holding capacity and assists with nutrient exchange needed for good plant growth.*

Q. How does Sun Gro test vermiculite?

A. *Sun Gro tests ore and exfoliated vermiculite every six months. Samples are sent to an independent laboratory that uses EPA approved testing methods. The samples are tested using PLM (Polarized Light Microscopy) and have been found to meet all government safety standards.*

Q. What tests have the government done on vermiculite?

A. *In July 2000, the EPA conducted a series of tests on expanded vermiculite and potting mixes containing vermiculite. The entire report is available at the web site listed below.*

Q. Where can I find out more on asbestos and vermiculite?

A. *Three web sites can provide more information. www.vermiculite.org and www.epa.gov/asbestos/verm.html and www.osha.gov.*



Position paper:

Why we removed vermiculite from consumer products but continue to use vermiculite in professional products.

Due to recent media reports and lawsuits alleging that vermiculite contains harmful levels of asbestos, consumer awareness of the issue has increased causing consumer's to question the necessity and safety of vermiculite. Sun Gro follows a rigorous testing process on both raw ingredients and finished products, including vermiculite. All Sun Gro products meet or exceed government (EPA and OSHA) safety levels, however due to the perception that vermiculite containing products are potentially harmful we have chosen to eliminate vermiculite from our retail product offering.

All retail mixes which contain vermiculite have been carefully reformulated to maintain the quality and characteristics of the original blend.

Despite on-going education efforts the horticultural industry has not been successful at informing reporters and consumers that vermiculite is not asbestos and that vermiculite is a safe product.

Professional growers who handle the product daily believe that vermiculite is a safe product and continue to use it to receive the product's various horticultural attributes.

Industry wide there has been a reduction in retail market products containing vermiculite and Sun Gro has decided to follow suit.

It is Sun Gro's policy that questions and inquires about asbestos and vermiculite be directed to the corporate technical specialist. Additionally, our web page: www.sungro.com, contains a section called "FAQ - Vermiculite" which provides answers to some of the most common questions posed by retailers and consumers. You can also find more information on the EPA (www.epa.gov), and OSHA (www.osha.gov) web sites.

Sun Gro appreciates your understanding with regards to this issue and looks forward to maintaining our position as a valued supplier for retail growing media needs.