

Tuesday, May 13, 2003

## Tec Labs sees repellent demand soar

By NIKI PRICE  
Albany Democrat Herald

The West Nile virus has yet to reach Oregon, but Tec Labs Inc. - the Albany maker of insect repellents and other outdoor products - is already seeing its effects.

Tec Labs manufactures two products that contain DEET (N, N diethyl-m-toluamide), the chemical that government agencies recommend to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes, which carry the virus.

The risks, while real, are limited. Since the illness was first identified in North America in 1999, fewer than 300 people have died and most people affected never even know their flulike symptoms are related to West Nile. Far more people die of the flu.

But as the illness has spread throughout the East Coast and Midwest, so has demand for products containing DEET. This year, Tec Labs will see sales of its 10-Hour Insect Repellent triple over 2002, predicted national sales manager Larry Burris.

Since its launch in 1988, the 10-Hour Insect Repellent has been used primarily by professionals: Utility workers, landscapers and other people who had a daily exposure to potentially harmful bugs. The product is 100 percent DEET, and its concentration provides the longest possible protection, Burris said.

Until now, the average consumer might not have seen the need for such a strong repellent, which must be applied with care and should not be used under clothing. But Tec Labs saw an opportunity and began to market to consumers.

"Before now, we haven't really pushed it much in the retail market," Burris said. "But when West Nile came around, we thought we had the best product around. So we reintroduced it into the retail market and have had great success."

The packaging for the 10-Hour Insect Repellent was revamped in February by Dave Leverich of Burkey & Leverich Design in Albany. The eye-catching black-and-red layout, with side labels carrying information on the West Nile virus, was designed to stand out on drug and grocery store shelves.

The sales boom has come at a minimal price for Tec Labs, Burris said.

The company doesn't invest in mass-market "shotgun" advertising, but instead markets to existing customers of its anti-lice products and outdoor skin cleansers, as well as through its retail outlets, where a 2 ounce bottle sells for around \$5.99.

"The main things are our package and our price. We put our dollars into the package, and it's competitively priced. So when consumers look at it, it jumps out at them," Burris said.

Last week, Albany workers were shipping the 10-hour product to Albertsons supermarkets across the nation for a Memorial Day promotion. All in all, Tec Labs' foray into the competitive retail repellent market has been a pleasant surprise.

"We got out there and promoted it, and with West Nile being a pretty big issue, it all fell together," Burris said.

The outlook is also promising for Tec Labs' other repellent, PowerDEET 25, which contains a 25 percent DEET concentration along with enhancers that target biting flies (\$4.95), and a new product, a single-use insect repellent towel, that will hit the catalog and industrial market this season (around 50 cents each).