Bayer Environmental Science

Need to Know

- Straight talk for professionals about pests and pest control products

Volume 3
No. 10
September 18, 2006

Are You Practicing "Good Tank Hygiene"?

Tanks, pumps, and hoses used to apply water-based pesticide formulations can build up bacteria or other microorganisms, leading to a foul odor or slimy film in the tank.

This microbial growth usually occurs in summer months when warm water is allowed to set undisturbed and becomes stagnant. The microorganisms that cause these problems are present in the water supply, including well water. The microorganisms feed on the inert ingredients in the formulation and, if allowed to grow unchecked, some bacterial can even produce extremely low levels of hydrogen sulfide, a gas that produces a characteristic "rotten egg" odor.

Figure 1. Common algae species that cause odor or slimy film inside spray tanks. (Image source: www.cees.iupui.edu)

Good Tank Hygiene Practice

Fortunately, the bacteria and fungi that cause the slimy build-up and foul odor can readily be eliminated by following some simple guidelines:

- Do not let a tank of mixed product sit overnight or longer. Only mix what you can use. This keeps the tank flushed with clean water.
- Do not leave the tank lid open to the air after filling. This allows microorganisms in the air to enter the tank.
- Fill tank 1/4 full with water (25 gallons typical), add approximately 1/2 gallon of common household bleach. Recirculate the bleach solution several minutes to clean and decontaminate surfaces in hoses and pumps. Discard rinse-water as per local regulations and repeat with clean water to remove bleach residue.

Following these guidelines on a regular basis, **especially in the warm summer months,** should keep your tank clean for years of use.

Contributed by Terry Gouge