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'The North Face' Clothing Parent Company Facing Nearly \$1M in Federal Fines Following Unsubstantiated Product Claims

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SAN FRANCISCO – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has filed suit against San Leandro based VF Corporation for the alleged sale and distribution of unregistered pesticides through their retail company, The North Face.

The EPA maintains that The North Face made unsubstantiated public health claims regarding unregistered products, and their ability to control germs and pathogens -- a violation of the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act. Products discovered online and evidence found at The North Face retail store in San Francisco led the Agency to issue a complaint against the VF Corporation.

“The EPA takes very seriously its responsibility to enforce against companies that sell products with unsubstantiated antimicrobial properties,” said Katherine Taylor, associate director of the Communities and Ecosystems Division in EPA’s Pacific Southwest region. “Unverified public health claims can lead people to believe they are protected from disease-causing organisms when, in fact, they may not be.”

At issue were more than 70 styles of footwear that incorporated an AgION silver treated footbed. The company sold the products making unsubstantiated claims that the footwear would prevent disease-causing bacteria. Specifically, The North Face made the following public health claims about the footwear on-line and on product packaging:

- “AgION antimicrobial silver agent inhibits the growth of disease-causing bacteria”
- “Prevents bacterial and fungal growth”
- Continuous release of antimicrobial agents

After being contacted by EPA, The North Face stopped making claims that their footwear protects against germs, removed claims from their website, and revised their product packaging.

Products that kill or repel bacteria or germs are considered pesticides, and must be registered with the EPA prior to distribution or sale. The Agency will not register a pesticide until it has been tested to show that it will not pose an unreasonable risk when used according to the directions. Consumers should be careful to look for the EPA registration number printed on product labels, and to follow the directions for proper use.

For more information please visit: http://www.epa.gov/PR_Notices/pr2000-1.pdf

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