

Highlighting innovative design features  
and useful application information for  
**Thermo Scientific CO<sub>2</sub> Incubators.**

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# smart notes

design and innovation ► CO<sub>2</sub> Incubation



# Q A

**Why is automated heat decontamination a better solution for sterilizing my CO<sub>2</sub> incubator than an automated chemical disinfection, such as *in situ* hydrogen peroxide vapor?**

A CO<sub>2</sub> incubator automated heat decontamination cycle delivers ease-of-use and proven effectiveness. After removing cells and any heat sensitive items from the incubator, simply push a button to begin the automated heat decontamination cycle. In contrast, *in situ* hydrogen peroxide (H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>) requires manual handling and a continuing investment in reagents, yet the effectiveness is uncertain.

Hydrogen peroxide vapor is often used for biological safety cabinets and room disinfection because heat decontamination is not possible due to the scope and size of these areas. This method uses external equipment to generate a concentrated vapor, and, due to the toxic nature of the H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub>, should be performed by trained personnel.

The “automated” in-chamber hydrogen peroxide vapor available on some CO<sub>2</sub> incubators is not the same as external H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> generation. This *in situ* H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> disinfection technology requires the user to handle the chemical and set up the H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> generator manually. This also involves disassembly and careful repositioning of all internal components – as much manual labor as separately autoclaving all of these parts. This additional handling may result in error or insufficient disinfection and can easily reintroduce contamination to the incubator chamber, jeopardizing cultured cells.



# Automated Heat Decontamination

## Hydrogen peroxide poses dangers for humans and cultured cells

Hydrogen peroxide vapor is toxic to humans and cultured cells as well as to microorganisms. This method for disinfecting laboratory equipment should be performed by a trained technician. The American Cancer Society states, "Direct skin contact with food grade hydrogen peroxide can cause blistering or burns, and breathing its vapors can cause serious breathing problems up to 72 hours later." ([www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org), "Oxygen Therapy") The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Association (OSHA) has set a Permissible Exposure Limit (PEL) of 1 part per million (ppm) per day exposure. Hydrogen peroxide can generate dangerous free radicals, damaging DNA and causing chromosomal aberrations. Based on these effects, any residual hydrogen peroxide must be entirely eliminated to avoid any detriment to cultured cells.

Dangers of Hydrogen Peroxide (as summarized from OSHA)	
Routes of Exposure:	Reference
Inhalation of vapor or mist, contact with eyes or skin, or ingestion	Sittig M 1991. Handbook of toxic and hazardous chemicals. 3rd ed. Park Ridge, NJ: Noyes Publications.
Health Hazard Effects:	Reference
Eye, skin and mucous membrane irritant	NIOSH 1995. Registry of toxic effects of chemical substances: Hydrogen Peroxide. Cincinnati, OH: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Centers for Disease Control.
Inhalation of 7 ppm causes lung irritation in humans; exposure to vapor or mist for even short periods can cause eye stinging and tearing.	NLM 1995. Hazardous substances data bank: Hydrogen Peroxide. Bethesda, MD: National Library of Medicine. Hathaway GJ et al. 1991. Proctor and Hughes' chemical hazards of the workplace. 3rd ed. New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
Mutagenic; damages DNA and causes chromosomal aberrations in cultured mammalian cells.	IARC 1985. IARC monographs on the evaluation of carcinogenic risk of chemicals to man. Volume 36. Lyon, France: World Health Organization, International Agency for Research on Cancer.
Liquid H <sub>2</sub> O <sub>2</sub> in contact with skin can cause whiteness or bleaching. If not washed promptly, irritation, redness and blisters can develop.	Hathaway GJ, Proctor NH, Hughes JP, and Fischman ML [1991]. Proctor and Hughes' chemical hazards of the workplace. 3rd ed. New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Table 1: Hydrogen peroxide poses dangers to humans and to cultured cells, as indicated by data summarized here. Data from the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Association at [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov).

## Choose a method with independent test results for proven effectiveness

An automated system for sterilization of a CO<sub>2</sub> incubator should provide consistent, measurable results that prove successful elimination of contamination. The effectiveness of automated hydrogen peroxide disinfection can be questionable because H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> molecules would have to make contact with every microorganism to be successful. Any microscopic areas missed by the H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> allow microorganisms to survive and propagate again. In contrast, Thermo Scientific™ CO<sub>2</sub> incubators provide independent proof of their high temperature cycles using accepted test microorganisms including bacterial spores. Application notes documenting these independent test results can be found at [thermoscientific.com/co2](http://thermoscientific.com/co2).

## Summary

Do-it-yourself hydrogen peroxide disinfection requires as much manual handling as autoclaving parts from a basic incubator. Any remaining residues can pose risk to cultured cells and humans and must be removed. This method is not proven to effectively eliminate contamination with the same assurance or ease of use that heat decontamination offers.

See how Thermo Scientific CO<sub>2</sub> incubators provide optimal cell growth. Learn more at [www.thermoscientific.com/co2incubators](http://www.thermoscientific.com/co2incubators)

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