Endless Surprises

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A reputable chemical company read a newspaper article about cave repair projects. The article mentioned that I was using Epon® 828 to repair speleothems. A representative called and encouraged me to try their competing product. Claiming their epoxy resin was inert, colorless, and had the same archival characteristics as the Epon, the guy sent me a sample. I made the mistake of believing he knew what he was talking about and, rather than first testing a small quantity of the product, I jumped in and used the new, unproven epoxy to repair a stalagmite in Endless Cave, New Mexico.

Several weeks after the repair, I returned to Endless Cave to find a lovely lavender ring around the break joint of the speleothem. Looking down to the floor, I was further incensed at finding a ring of dead cave crickets around the base of the stalagmite.

Immediately, I started digging out the purple epoxy and rescued the repair and the future cricket population by replacing the purple goo with Epon. We do learn from embarrassing faux pas.

The moral of this story is ... test first to avoid toxic surprises.

Figure 1. An untested, unproven epoxy grew a purple ring of fungi within a few weeks of application on this stalagmite repair in Endless Cave, New Mexico.

Figure 2. Jim Werker in a “Guano Happens” T-shirt working on the purple ring left by a new epoxy. He used Epon 828 and Versamid 40 to replace the unsuccessful adhesive.