

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1303

September 21, 2018

The Honorable Andrew Wheeler
Acting Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Acting Administrator Wheeler:

I am writing to express concern about the potential public health threats resulting from ethylene oxide (EtO) emissions at the Sterigenics facility at 7775 S. Quincy St. and 830 Midway Drive in Willowbrook, IL (hereafter "the facility"). As you are likely aware, there has been significant public outcry following the August 21 release of a report by the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) evaluating the potential health impacts of EtO emissions from the facility.

According to the ATSDR report, which was based on U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) air sampling data collected in May of this year, the estimated increased cancer risk due to EtO exposure in the residential areas surrounding the facility is 6.4 cases per 1,000 people. The estimated increased cancer risk to workers in close proximity to the facility is 2.1 cases per 1,000 people. While these estimates are based on limited data and the full extent of the public health threat is not yet clear, potentially serious consequences warrant decisive action.

Our understanding of the carcinogenicity of EtO has advanced significantly in recent years, and as a result, in 2016, the USEPA increased its estimated cancer risk for EtO by a factor of 30 over its previous estimate from 1985. However, the facility's most recent operating permit (Illinois Environmental Protection Agency Clean Air Act Permit Program Permit Number 95120085) was issued on June 8, 2015, prior to the release of the most recent carcinogenicity estimate, and therefore does not take the updated risk assessment into account. Although all available evidence suggests that the facility is fully in compliance with its permit, I am concerned that the permit conditions do not guarantee an adequate level of public health protection.

While the facility voluntarily made improvements to its pollution control system in July of this year, a step which is likely to reduce ambient air concentrations of EtO in the surrounding area, the results of this change are not yet known. Testing of the upgraded system taking place on September 20-21, 2018, will yield more information on emissions from the facility but may not be sufficient to demonstrate that nearby communities are no longer at risk. In order to more

conclusively assess the current exposure risk to the residents of Willowbrook, I urge you to move swiftly to conduct another round of ambient air testing, similar to what was done in May of this year. It is reasonable for the community to expect that the EPA does this type of testing to protect their health.

In absence of conclusive data showing that EtO emissions from the facility no longer pose a public health threat, I request that you take immediate legal action to halt operations at the facility as you are empowered to do under Section 303 of the Clean Air Act. That section allows you to take action to stop the emission of air pollutants at a source “presenting an imminent and substantial endangerment to public health or welfare, or the environment.” Following such action, I request that your Agency, in coordination with the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, review and revise the facility’s permit in light of USEPA’s most recent Integrated Risk Information System assessments of the health risks posed by EtO. I further request that the facility not be allowed to resume operations until and unless it is possible to do so without posing a substantial public health threat to the surrounding area. In the interest of rebuilding public confidence in the environmental health and safety of the facility, I encourage you to consider requiring regular monitoring of airborne EtO concentrations at the facility’s fenceline and the timely public release of monitoring results to the public.

Please inform me as to how you plan to proceed on this issue by contacting Joel Creswell in my office at 202-225-5701 or joel.creswell@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,



Daniel W. Lipinski
Member of Congress