

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

July 23, 2019

The Honorable Andrew Wheeler
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington D.C. 20004

Dear Administrator Andrew Wheeler:

In light of recent developments regarding the potential re-opening of the Sterigenics facility in Willowbrook, Illinois, we write to reiterate the request that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) promulgate a new, stricter national standard for facilities emitting ethylene oxide (EtO)—both for commercial sterilization and miscellaneous organic manufacturing—as soon as possible. We also request that a timeline of events, along with a status of progress, be shared publically to reassure neighboring communities that the EPA is working to mitigate the cancer risk associated with prolonged EtO exposure.

The EPA is taking too long to move forward with an action to protect communities surrounding ethylene oxide facilities.

Since the 2016 EPA Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) assessment finding that EtO has an inhalation cancer risk that is 30 times higher than was previously estimated, the most recent National Air Toxics Assessment (NATA) and an Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) report have shown that residents in DuPage and Lake County, Illinois, may be subject to higher rates of cancer due to hazardous pollutants.

Since the release of these reports, EPA had conducted outdoor ambient air monitoring of EtO outside of the Sterigenics facility in Willowbrook, Illinois, which showed concentrations as high as 880 times what is deemed acceptable by the EPA's IRIS assessment. These measurements also determined that concentrations had significantly dropped after the Seal Order was placed on Sterigenics, and that the facility was responsible for the observed elevated emissions.

Despite several requests from the Illinois congressional delegation for such measurements to be made in Lake County, EPA refused to do so. As a result, Lake County officials contracted with a third-party firm to conduct monitoring, which showed concentrations as high as 300 times the acceptable limit from the EPA's IRIS assessment. This was around the same concentration measured at Sterigenics when the Illinois EPA decided to place a Seal Order on the facility.

Even after elevated levels of EtO emissions have been found around the facilities in Willowbrook and Lake County, the EPA has been slow to respond to this public health crisis.

The EPA should conduct ambient air monitoring in Lake County and it must move forward immediately to promulgate a more protective national EtO standard and to provide a timeline for these actions. Federal reports and EPA's own science demonstrate that the existing standards needs to be revised to protect public health in communities across the county.

Thank you for considering our requests, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Daniel W. Lipinski
United States Representative



Bradley S. Schneider
United States Representative



Bill Foster
United States Representative



Sean Casten
United States Representative