



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

April 9, 2019

OFFICE OF  
AIR AND RADIATION

The Honorable Lauren Underwood  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Underwood:

Thank you for your February 15, 2019, and March 29, 2019, letters to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regarding ethylene oxide emissions. The Administrator asked me to respond to you on his behalf.

EPA is taking a two-pronged approach to address emissions of ethylene oxide in Willowbrook, Illinois and around the country, and is committed to providing information to the public throughout the process. First, EPA is reviewing and updating Clean Air Act regulations for facilities that emit ethylene oxide. Several existing rules issued under the Clean Air Act Section 112 cover sources associated with ethylene oxide emissions. Regulatory processes are already underway for many of these rules. For example, EPA is currently reviewing its rule for the Miscellaneous Organic Chemical Manufacturing source category. The agency anticipates proposing necessary revisions to that rule by mid-2019, reviewing public comments submitted on that proposal, and finalizing the rule revisions in March 2020. Simultaneously, EPA is reviewing other rules associated with emissions of ethylene oxide, including commercial sterilizers, such as Sterigenics. We anticipate proposing necessary revisions for the commercial sterilizer rule in mid-2019 and will release schedules for other rules as they are determined. Second, EPA is gathering additional information on ethylene oxide emissions to both help EPA as it evaluates opportunities to reduce ethylene oxide emissions as part of its regulations review, and help the agency determine whether more immediate emission reduction steps are necessary in particular locations.

As part of our work under the second prong of the approach for the Sterigenics Willowbrook facility, we are developing a better understanding of the emissions from the facility and will use that information to conduct a risk assessment for the Willowbrook area. In addition, EPA has read the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) assessment of cancer incidence in the population and agrees with IDPH that further assessment is needed. EPA is proceeding with its risk assessment, which will estimate future cancer risk due to the Sterigenics Willowbrook facility's ethylene oxide emissions and will help inform decisions about further actions needed to protect public health in this community. This assessment will be more refined than either EPA's National Air Toxics Assessment or the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry's analysis. Specifically, it will be the type of risk assessment EPA conducts when determining

whether to update industrial source sector regulations to improve public health protection. EPA has begun work on its risk assessment for the Willowbrook area, which the Agency expects to complete later this Spring.

To help inform this particular risk assessment, EPA prepared and followed a monitoring plan to measure the ambient concentrations of ethylene oxide in the commercial and residential areas surrounding the Sterigenics facility in Willowbrook. This plan was developed with input from community leaders and based on air dispersion modeling using results of stack tests conducted at the Sterigenics facility in Willowbrook in September 2018 and subsequent technical analysis. Based on feedback from the community, EPA began monitoring in Willowbrook in November 2018, seeking 3 months of air quality monitoring data. Monitoring continued during the partial government shutdown. After 4 ½ months of testing the community's air for ethylene oxide, EPA paused air quality monitoring in Willowbrook at the end of March 2019, well after the facility ceased operations. The Agency is evaluating options – including whether to resume monitoring – if conditions in the community change.


As EPA has reviewed the monitoring data, we have been posting it and associated information to our dedicated website at: <https://www.epa.gov/il/sterigenics-willowbrook-facility-documents>. EPA will post results of the March air quality sampling after quality assurance is complete and will hold a public webinar to review the results. Please continue to check this website for additional information as it becomes available.

EPA and the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency are coordinating with the facilities in Lake County, Illinois, to achieve additional emission reductions. The Agencies are also using a variety of tools, such as air dispersion modeling, to better characterize potential risks near the Lake County facilities, as well as other facilities and areas that NATA, which is EPA's screening tool, identified as potentially having elevated risks. EPA is not conducting ambient monitoring in Lake County; however, the Agency is coordinating with the Lake County Health Department on the testing they are planning and is providing technical assistance.

EPA will continue to coordinate closely with state and local air agencies, and across EPA offices, as we continue to work to address ethylene oxide and protect public health across the United States.

If you have additional questions, please contact me or your staff may contact Matthew Davis in the Office of Congressional Affairs at (202) 564-1267 or [davis.matthew@epa.gov](mailto:davis.matthew@epa.gov). I appreciate the opportunity to be of service and trust the information provided is helpful.

Sincerely,



William L. Wehrum  
Assistant Administrator