

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

May 15, 2019

Cathy Stepp
Region 5 Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
77 West Jackson Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60604-3590

Dear Administrator Stepp:

We write to request that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) immediately conduct inspections of all Region 5 facilities that use ethylene oxide (EtO) for miscellaneous organic manufacturing and commercial sterilization to identify and quantify fugitive emissions, and to evaluate the pollution control technology used to control stack emissions. We urge EPA to conduct such inspections under Section 114 of the Clean Air Act to ensure that dangerous amounts of EtO—a known carcinogen—are not being emitted to the atmosphere and increasing cancer risks in neighborhoods surrounding facilities that use EtO. We also request that these inspection data and findings be made publically available, and that EPA works with the facilities to identify and reduce any emissions of concern.

As you know, EPA's 2016 Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) report found EtO to be 30-fold more carcinogenic at lower concentrations than was previously understood, and subsequently identified areas of potentially higher risk of cancer in its latest National Air Toxics Assessment (NATA) released last year. Since then, EPA conducted outdoor ambient air monitoring of EtO in the Willowbrook, IL community from November 2018 – March 2019. Measurements as high as 880 times the EPA's IRIS value's "acceptable limit" were observed, despite attempts by Sterigenics to reduce emissions by re-connecting a back vent to the pollution control equipment in summer 2018. This monitoring demonstrates that facilities with EtO operations may be emitting higher concentrations than estimated, and that the communities around these facilities may be subject to higher cancer incidences. An audit and inspection of these facilities could provide insights into what further actions that the EPA may need to take in order to protect those who live around these facilities.

Medline Inc. in Waukegan, IL, and Vantage Specialty Chemicals Inc. in Gurnee, IL, have not had ambient air monitoring conducted by the EPA, despite several requests for such measurements made by the Illinois congressional delegation. These requests come with even more urgency after it was shown that the concentrations of EtO around the Sterigenics facility significantly decreased after the Illinois EPA shut down the use of EtO at the facility in mid-February by a Seal Order. Since the EPA will not move forward with monitoring requests around other EtO-emitting facilities—including those in Lake County, IL—despite the EPA's public acknowledgment that significantly higher concentrations of EtO were observed outside of

the Sterigenics facility before EtO use was halted by the Seal Order, we ask that the EPA work with all facilities in Region 5 to conduct emissions inspections on pollution control practices and fugitive emissions estimates, as soon as possible.

The EPA is taking too long to move forward with an action to protect communities surrounding ethylene oxide facilities. That is why we urge the EPA to immediately begin an EtO emissions inspection at all Region 5 facilities, for both fugitive and stack emissions, and make these inspection data publically available.


We look forward to your prompt response to this serious matter.

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


Lauren Underwood
United States Representative