



# **Durbin, Duckworth, Foster request EPA investigation into Rauner and Trump administrations' delay of notifying public about Sterigenics cancer risks**

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CHICAGO – U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and U. S. Representative Bill Foster (D-IL-11) today requested the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) investigate if EPA complied with all statutory, regulatory, and policy requirements and protocols when it intentionally withheld critical health information from the public about carcinogenic air pollution from the Sterigenics facility in DuPage County, Illinois. Their request follows a [story](#) published by the *Chicago Tribune* last week that detailed how Governor Bruce Rauner's Administration, along with the Trump Administration, chose to not inform the public of serious cancer risks associated with emissions from the Sterigenics plant in Willowbrook, Illinois, for at least eight months after it learned of the risks.

“The EPA is responsible for protecting human health with safeguards to assure our nation has clean and safe air, water, and environment for all Americans. Making certain that proper action is taken when it is discovered that a community is facing a public health risk, is essential for the public to have confidence that the EPA is doing its job,” the members wrote in their letter to EPA Acting Inspector General Charles Sheehan.

An August report detailed higher than normal cancer risks in the area surrounding Sterigenics, a Willowbrook-based company that uses ethylene oxide to sterilize medical products and equipment. Ethylene oxide has been classified as a known carcinogen by the EPA and has been found to cause cancer.

In October, Durbin, Duckworth, and Foster sent a [letter](#) to the U.S. EPA requesting federal assistance to help community groups in DuPage County understand the magnitude of the public health dangers they are facing, medical monitoring for

community members who have been exposed to ethylene oxide, as well as immediate actions to assess and reduce ethylene oxide exposure across the country.

On October 10, Durbin and Duckworth had a call with EPA Acting Administrator, Andrew Wheeler, about Sterigenics where they continued to press the EPA for a time frame for ambient air monitoring, modeling, and revising the Clean Air Act standard.

In September, Durbin, Duckworth, and Foster requested [EPA](#) and [Sterigenics](#) begin testing local air quality for harmful ethylene oxide emissions and make their results available to the general public – and that the company provide personal exposure tests to Willowbrook residents. The EPA notified the Members of Congress on September 27 that it had begun to test air quality from the Sterigenics plant for emissions of ethylene oxide, but still had not conducted ambient air testing for the surrounding area.

Full text of the letter is available [here](#) and below:

November 1, 2018

Dear Acting Inspector General Sheehan,

We officially request the Office of the Inspector General of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) investigate if EPA complied with all statutory, regulatory, and policy requirements and protocols when it intentionally withheld critical health information from the public about carcinogenic air pollution from the Sterigenics facility in DuPage County, Illinois. We are concerned that the agency failed to take swift action to protect the health of a community that suffers from some of the highest cancer risks in the nation.

The 2016 Integrated Risk Information System report found ethylene oxide (EtO) to be much more carcinogenic at lower concentrations than previously thought. As a result, the 2014 National Air Toxics Assessment showed that DuPage County residents have an increased cancer risk from EtO exposure. In December 2017, EPA sent a letter to Sterigenics linking high cancer risks in the area to EtO emissions from the facility. However, EPA decided to withhold this vital information from the public for eight months.

An investigation is necessary to determine whether proper measures were taken to protect the lives of those affected by EtO emissions from the facility, to hold officials accountable, and to assure that proper protocol is followed in the future if any similar situation arises.

The EPA is responsible for protecting human health with safeguards to assure our nation has clean and safe air, water, and environment for all Americans. Making certain that proper action is taken when it is discovered that a community is facing a public health risk, is essential for the public to have confidence that the EPA is doing its job.

We look forward to your prompt response to this urgent request for a comprehensive investigation.