



ILLINOIS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Written Statement of the Illinois Chamber of Commerce
Re: Ethylene Oxide and Sterigenics Willowbrook Facility

The Illinois Chamber of Commerce understands that there are a number of questions and concerns regarding the potential for emissions of ethylene oxide (“EtO”) to negatively impact human health. On behalf of the Illinois businesses and employers that make up the Chamber’s membership, the Chamber is concerned for the potential for the questions and concerns to result in bad precedent, bad policy, and further weaken Illinois’ reputation and business climate.

Some of the proposals that have been discussed include closing down a lawfully operating business; revoking their state issued environmental permits (effectively demanding that the business cease operating); or banning the use of EtO altogether. The Chamber considers all of these proposals to be extremely troubling, especially given the politically and emotionally charged and rushed manner in which these very important decisions are being made.

The reality is that chemicals, such as EtO, are part of many businesses in Illinois. Society puts trust in those businesses and in the agencies that regulate them to ensure that they’re used, stored, emitted and/or disposed of in a manner that is protective of both human health and the environment. When new science or understanding of risks or hazards emerges, the appropriate response is to turn to the experts to ensure that those risks and hazards are mitigated, if not eliminated, through proper safeguards and procedures. If Illinois banned every chemical that posed a threat, our economy would be decimated.

EtO is a crucial part of our nation’s medical device and services industry as a sterilization agent, ensuring that hospitals have sterile devices and equipment. EtO is also an essential component in other industries in Illinois, vital in the manufacturing of many household goods, and has been for years. Those businesses that use EtO currently handle it with care, consistent with existing requirements, and technologies to ensure that it does not become a problem in the environment exist. Banning its use would have widespread impacts on many of Illinois’ large employers, and appears to the Chamber to be short sighted. The revised scientific studies that have led to the current reassessing of the potential health impacts of EtO exposure are being contested by experts in the field; the Chamber urges Illinois policy makers to exercise caution and let the existing processes play out before taking any hasty or rash reactionary action.

In conclusion, the Illinois Chamber understands that the natural response of the community in the face of unanswered questions is to be concerned. The experts are working diligently to get you the answers that you seek and the regulatory agencies are working to ensure that adequate safeguards for public health and the environment are in place. The Illinois Chamber is supportive of that process and looks forward to being part of the ongoing dialog. It may take longer than some are willing to wait, but the Chamber counsels against reactionary policies and actions.