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Teri

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HOUSE DISTRICT 42

Sterigenics Update

Dear friend,

I wanted to share with you the latest updates on an issue that you've probably seen in the news or on social media. In late July, **tens of thousands of Georgians in Cobb, Fulton, and Newton Counties were suddenly made aware that they'd been exposed a toxic air-born chemical** [when a story that was jointly reported by Andy Miller at Georgia Health News and Brenda Goodman of WebMD was published](#). Since that time, conversations about this issue are justifiably dominated by fear and anger.

I believe that the best way to combat fear is with facts, and the key facts are that we must immediately, accurately, and independently confirm the current levels of ethylene oxide in our community's atmosphere.

Ethylene oxide (EO) is a potent chemical that is a highly effective way to sterilize medical equipment. Bacteria and fungi are no match for this invisible gas that can penetrate cardboard, paper, and plastic, and medical equipment that ranges from IV tubing to catheters to just about anything else used in a hospital setting, and that is typically sterilized after it's been manufactured, individually packaged, and packed in cardboard cartons, and before it reaches its final destination at a hospital or healthcare provider.

Unfortunately, as Miller and Goodman reported, **EO can also “snip and scramble DNA”, the instructions for how living cells work. These errors in DNA can cause cells to grow uncontrollably, leading to cancer, [particularly breast cancer, stomach cancer, leukemia, and lymphoma.](#)**

Two medical sterilization facilities that use EO, **Sterigenics in unincorporated Cobb County** and **BD Bard in Newton County**, were identified in June by the Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) as having EO levels that **“exceed the state’s determined level of a chemical at which health risks begin to rise.”** That “determined level” is known as the Acceptable Area Concentration, or AAC, and according to the reporting done by GHN and WebMD, “The AAC for ethylene oxide represents one additional case of cancer for every 1 million people exposed.”

In one of this story’s most troubling details, it was revealed that **the Georgia EPD was aware of these EO hotspots for nearly a year, starting in August 2018, but declined to issue any kind of public notice, nor did the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).**

In the two weeks since this news broke, it has been an absolute whirlwind of both grassroots mobilization and political response, particularly in Cobb County. Notably:

- Led by **State Representative Erick Allen** and **State Senator Jen Jordan**, [Cobb leaders hosted a community meeting](#) that included representation from Sterigenics in Smyrna that drew attendees that far exceeded a middle school auditorium.

- [Smyrna Mayor Max Bacon announced that the city would pursue independent air quality testing, and Cobb Commission Chair Mike Boyce quickly followed suit.](#)
- An [online](#) and [on-the-ground grassroots movement](#) inspired by a similar organization in Willowbrook, Illinois, a city that is also [home to a currently-shuttered Sterigenics facility](#), gained several thousand followers.
- [Governor Kemp's office responded to the news](#) and joined the coordinated effort that began with state, county, and municipal lawmakers in Cobb County.
- The EPD expedited the process to [approve Sterigenics' application](#), submitted last week, to reduce EO emissions at their Cobb facility.
- The Georgia EPD [launched an information portal](#) to share their latest EO updates.
- Because of the overwhelming community interest in this issue, **Cobb Commissioner Bob Ott** rescheduled a town hall meeting that had been originally scheduled for this week at a much smaller venue for [Monday, August 19, at 7 PM at the Cobb Civic Center](#). In addition to state, county, and local elected leaders, the meeting's lineup will include representatives from the **EPA**, the **Georgia EPD**, and the **CDC**. **Congressman David Scott** also plans to attend.
- On August 7, [the City of Smyrna announced that it is establishing an Oversight Committee which will consist of local elected officials, public health and emergency management professionals, and other local stakeholders to with with an independent Air Quality Task Force of private technology experts to quickly implement a plan to test the air near the Sterigenics plant, and analyze all test results.](#) This group will also coordinate with GHD, the company that conducted independent testing in Willowbrook, Illinois. Testing should begin within the next few weeks.

My immediate priorities are to continue to share with you the

latest details as this issue continues to develop, to ensure that independent, third party air quality testing begins as soon as possible, and to continue to work with my colleagues in the General Assembly, in Cobb County, and in the City of Smyrna to reach a solution that ensures that the air we breathe is safe and clean. In addition, I will explore ways to strengthen our environmental laws and policies in Georgia to ensure that our government leaders and agencies will operate transparently and proactively to enforce the highest, science-backed standards for environmental safety.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

All the best,

Teri



Representative Teri Anulewicz represents the citizens of District 42, which includes portions of Cobb County. She was elected into the House of Representatives in 2017 and currently serves on the Code Revision, Intragovernmental Coordination and Transportation committees.

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