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June 9, 2022

**TO:** Each Supervisor

**FROM:** Dr. Barbara Ferrer, Ph.D., M.P.H., M.Ed.  
Director 

**SUBJECT: JOINT ENFORCEMENT ACTION AND COMMUNITY NOTIFICATION OF ETHYLENE OXIDE EMISSIONS FROM STERIGENICS IN THE CITY OF VERNON AND SURROUNDING NEIGHBORHOODS (ITEM 79-F, AGENDA OF MAY 17, 2022)**

This memorandum is in response to your May 17, 2022, motion directing the Department of Public Health (Public Health) to work in collaboration with the City of Vernon (Vernon) and in partnership with local community organizations and community health workers/promotoras, to provide nearby community members information on ethylene oxide emissions and what is being done to reduce emissions, as well as its health effects and how residents can reduce potential exposure to these emissions. The motion further instructed Public Health to coordinate an interagency working group to address the release of emissions at Sterigenics. This report provides an update on these issues and related efforts.

**BACKGROUND**

On May 6, 2022, the County received a Proposition 65 Notification from the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) identifying a substantial release of ethylene oxide from Sterigenics, a medical sterilization facility in Vernon. Sterigenics operates two facilities that use ethylene oxide to sterilize medical devices. Both facilities are located between 49th St. and 50th St. on Gifford Ave., which is an industrial area within Vernon. These facilities are near residential areas within the City of Maywood. The nearest Maywood residential area is located approximately 500 feet away, and the nearest school is about 1700 feet away.

SCAQMD issued a Notice of Violation to Sterigenics for its failure to maintain equipment in good operating condition. SCAQMD has committed to taking all available regulatory and legal

action to reduce harmful emissions from Sterigenics. SCAQMD, the regulatory entity that is responsible for air monitoring and enforcing air regulations, is currently working with the State's Office of Environmental Health and Hazard Assessment to evaluate the cancer risk for off-site workers. SCAQMD is evaluating off-site worker exposure because those are the persons most susceptible to negative health effects because of the proximity of their worksite to any ethylene oxide emissions from a Sterigenics facility.

Individual air monitor "grab" samples have been collected by SCAQMD at three Maywood community locations. Sampling results show levels of ethylene oxide in the community to be consistent with background levels, except for a sample collected downwind at Maywood Elementary School, which was slightly above background range. SCAQMD has placed two air monitors outside of each Sterigenics facility to collect 24-hour samples, however Public Health contends that more continuous air monitoring locations are needed in the surrounding community to better understand the potential exposure of nearby workers, residents, and school populations to the carcinogen, ethylene oxide.

#### **PROVIDE INFORMATION TO NEARBY COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

On May 12, 2022, Public Health conducted door-to-door canvassing to distribute a bilingual Community Advisory handout to the 191 homes located in Maywood near the Sterigenics facility, speaking to 129 residents. Public Health provided information on the elevated levels of ethylene oxide reported at the Sterigenics facility; the potential health effects of exposure; actions being taken by SCAQMD, the City of Vernon and Public Health; and how to report concerns to SCAQMD and Public Health. On May 26, 2022, Public Health distributed updated information to the community, which provided a summary of the most recent SCAQMD air monitoring readings. Those readings showed ethylene oxide levels in the community being at or similar to background levels from other parts of the Los Angeles region and below health risk levels established by the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment. In addition, Public Health developed [a website with information about Sterigenics](#) where current information can be accessed. Due to the most recent community air monitoring results, no specific mitigation measures are being recommended to community members at this time.

The City of Vernon Health Department is conducting outreach in the area adjacent to the Sterigenics facility to provide offsite workers and other nearby businesses with information on ethylene oxide emissions and recommended protective actions to take.

#### **COORDINATION OF AN INTERAGENCY WORKGROUP**

Public Health convened a workgroup with representatives from SCAQMD, the City of Vernon Health Department, and the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) to support SCAQMD's investigation, assess the air monitoring data, and to coordinate joint and individual agency actions. The workgroup has met on a weekly basis to inform on regulatory actions, discuss health risks, and coordinate public information.

SCAQMD is overseeing immediate and near-term actions required of Sterigenics, including source testing, identification of emission sources that are contributing to the elevated levels, and measures to reduce ethylene oxide emissions. SCAQMD reports that although measurements of ethylene

oxide in the residential community within the City of Maywood near the Sterigenics facilities are similar to readings from other parts of the Los Angeles region, and below health risk levels established by the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, ethylene oxide measurements just outside the facility remain elevated enough to present a potential health risk for offsite workers. More information on the SCAQMD investigation can be found on the [SCAQMD website](#).

**NEXT STEPS**

Public Health will continue to convene the workgroup as air monitoring data becomes available and Sterigenics takes action to mitigate ethylene oxide emissions. Monthly updates on the work related to Sterigenics will be provided, as directed by your Board. Please let me know if you have any questions or would like additional information.

BF:cc

c: Chief Executive Officer  
Executive Office, Board of Supervisors  
Acting County Counsel  
SCAQMD  
City of Vernon