



PRESS RELEASE

Attorney General Frosh Urges EPA to Implement Stricter Ethylene Oxide Emissions Standards

BALTIMORE, MD (October 11, 2019) – Maryland Attorney General Brian E. Frosh joined a coalition of 14 states urging the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to propose and finalize stricter standards for ethylene oxide (EtO) emissions promptly. According to the EPA’s own assessment, EtO is a carcinogen to humans by inhalation and among the most hazardous air pollutants.

In a [letter](#) sent to the EPA, the coalition argues that the current EPA standard for EtO fails to protect workers and communities. Stricter emissions standards are necessary to protect residents nationwide from the harmful effects of EtO. The coalition recognizes that a critical step in reducing EtO emissions is to reduce the use of EtO, which is why the attorneys general are also calling on the EPA to work with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to support research into effective alternatives to EtO sterilization.

“The EPA has failed to update national EtO emissions standards for too long. It has put us all at risk,” said Attorney General Frosh. “EtO emissions cause cancer, according to the EPA’s own analyses, and every moment it delays doing its job, the danger to individuals in Maryland and across the country increases.”

Commercial sterilization facilities are a major source of EtO emissions across the nation. Emissions from these facilities are subject to a National Emissions Standard for Hazardous Air Pollutants (NESHAP), which the EPA is required to review every eight years. The EPA last reviewed the NESHAP for commercial sterilizers in 2006 and failed to make any meaningful changes. In 2001, the EPA ended the requirement that facilities control emissions from the back vents of the chambers used to conduct EtO sterilization. As a result of this step backward, thousands of pounds of EtO escape out of these vents and into the ambient air annually, in addition to the tens of thousands of pounds of EtO the current NESHAP allows commercial sterilizers to release into communities annually.

Over 288,000 people live in areas across the country that the EPA identified to be at elevated risk of EtO exposure, and there are more than 100 commercial sterilization facilities located 36 states subject to the nationwide EtO standard. Because the EPA has not updated the national standard to reflect current science, states have been required to step in and reevaluate the emissions standard for EtO, leading to a dramatic reduction in EtO emissions in those areas.

The attorneys general assert that the EPA continues to move too slowly to adopt the regulations needed to protect the public from the harms of EtO. Regulating hazardous air pollutants is the responsibility of the EPA, and the EPA owes it to the public to meet this obligation.

In addition to Maryland, the letter was signed by the attorneys general of California, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Iowa, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin.