

Located in Kingsbury, just 4.5 miles by car from Glens Falls, Sterigenics is a little known industrial plant that releases dangerous amounts of a carcinogen into the air. This medical equipment sterilization facility employs 30 people. Sterigenics fumigates medical equipment with ethylene oxide, a volatile, easily absorbed chemical that was added to the federal list of carcinogens in 1985.

Recent research has found that ethylene oxide is far more dangerous than previously believed. In 2016, EPA determined that exposure to even small concentrations of ethylene oxide can cause breast cancer, leukemia and lymphomas.

Ethylene oxide is invisible to the eye, and at low, but harmful, concentrations, people will not be able to smell it. It is a colorless liquid at temperatures below 51°F and a colorless gas at room temperature. At high concentrations, ethylene oxide may have a sweet, ether-like odor. However, dangerous exposures may occur at levels too low to smell.

More than 700 lawsuits have been filed against a similar Sterigenics facility in Willowbrook, Illinois. These lawsuits allege that its ethylene oxide emissions caused health problems, including cancer and miscarriages. (See Aug. 21, 2020 *Chicago Tribune* article.)

In 2019, Sterigenics announced that it would leave Willowbrook, Illinois, “eliminating the key source of cancer-causing ethylene oxide in Chicago’s western suburbs,” according to *The Chicago Tribune*. The *Tribune* called the company’s decision “a stunning victory” for community activists, who organized and fought to drive the plant out of their town. Federal records show that this Sterigenics facility was one of the nation’s largest industrial sources of cancer-causing ethylene oxide pollution.

**The Kingsbury facility presents a similar danger to area residents.** The US EPA’s Risk Screening Environmental Indicator (RSEI) score for ethylene oxide, the carcinogen utilized at the Sterigenics facility in Kingsbury, gives Glens Falls one of the highest cancer risks in NYS.

The Risk Screening Environmental Indicator (RSEI) model is geographically based. It indicates what is actually coming out of the smokestacks and otherwise released by industrial facilities. RSEI incorporates information from the Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) on the amount of toxic chemicals released, together with factors such as the chemical’s fate and transport through the environment, each chemical’s relative toxicity, and potential human exposure. RSEI Scores can be used to help establish priorities for further investigation.

The RSEI scores are presented county-by-county. The county score for Warren is about 43,000, which puts it in the bottom quartile of counties. Even per-capita risk isn’t very high. So, you might dismiss it as providing any evidence of the risk residents incur from toxic emissions. **But the EPA also provides data on all facilities posing a risk that are within ten miles of any address.** Paul Hancock, PhD compiled the RSEI scores for the largest city or town by population in every county in New York state, using the 10-mile radius. This changed very few of the RSEI scores for the other counties; that is, their scores didn’t move up or down. But the RSEI score for

Glens Falls (the largest city in Warren County) jumped to 34 per capita, making it the third highest RSEI score for that 10-mile radius in the entire state.