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FEEDBACK

BREAKING NEWS NEWS

Hundreds more lawsuits filed over ethylene oxide emissions at Sterigenics plant in Willowbrook

By MORGAN GREENE
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Hundreds of new lawsuits have been filed against Sterigenics alleging that health problems including cancer and miscarriages were caused by ethylene oxide emissions from the Willowbrook facility, bringing the total number of cases filed in Cook County against the sterilization company to more than 700.

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This week, more than 600 individual lawsuits were filed on behalf of people who lived and worked near Sterigenics, according to Romanucci & Blandin, one of the law firms filing the cases. The new lawsuits follow the approximately 75 filed previously.

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Sterigenics has known of ethylene oxide's carcinogenic effects since at least 1984, one of the complaints alleges. "Notwithstanding, Defendants chose to operate their business and emit EtO in a densely populated area full of children, houses, parks, schools, and business," the filing reads.

Defendants in the lawsuits include Sterigenics U.S. LLC, Sotera Health, Griffith Foods, private equity firm GTCR LLC and two managers.

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“Sterigenics empathizes with anyone battling cancer, but we are confident that operations at our Willowbrook facility are not responsible for causing the illnesses alleged in any lawsuit,” a spokesman for the company said in a statement responding to inquiries about the lawsuits. “As we have stated previously, we intend to vigorously defend against the plaintiffs’ unfounded and meritless claims.”

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Patrick Salvi II of Salvi, Schostok & Pritchard, another firm representing the plaintiffs, said in a statement that the “magnitude of the number of individual cases filed shows the devastating impact Sterigenics had on the Willowbrook community.”

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have justice served.”

In January, attorneys said more lawsuits were likely to come over health problems allegedly caused by the facility. In the 76th lawsuit filed, [six women who worked at Hinsdale South High School for at least 18 years alleged they contracted cancer](#) because of toxic ethylene oxide emissions from the company’s plant in Willowbrook.

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Activists from Stop Sterigenics gather at Willowbrook Village Hall to celebrate Sterigenics' announcement of its plans to exit operations in Willowbrook on Sept., 30, 2019. (Camille Fine / Chicago Tribune)

The initial 75 cases filed in Cook County Circuit Court were assigned to Judge Christopher Lawler with Antonio M. Romanucci as the court-appointed lead counsel.

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Sterigenics [closed its Willowbrook plant in September](#), citing an unstable regulatory landscape and a failure to broker a new deal on its lease amid opposition from community groups and local politicians.

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The Willowbrook facility, which sterilized medical equipment with ethylene oxide, came to public attention in 2018 when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency listed surrounding neighborhoods among just a few dozen

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thought, and in 2016 the EPA concluded that exposure to even small concentrations can cause breast cancer, leukemia and lymphomas.

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The Chicago Tribune's Megan Crepeau and Michael Hawthorne contributed.

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Morgan Greene is a metro reporter for the Chicago Tribune who covers human interest stories, breaking news, the park district and everything in between. A Cleveland native, she graduated from the Theatre School at DePaul University, joined the Tribune in 2015 as an editorial assistant and still enjoys seeing a good show on a night off.

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By **DANIEL BRAUDER**

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