



SOUTH COAST AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT DISTRICT PRESS RELEASE

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South Coast AQMD Requires Sterigenics in Vernon to Immediately Reduce Ethylene Oxide Emissions

Elevated Levels Can Result in Temporary Curtailment

DIAMOND BAR – Today, the South Coast Air Quality Management District (South Coast AQMD) approved a plan requiring steps to be taken immediately to reduce health risks from Sterigenics US, LLC., a medical sterilization facility in Vernon, California. The plan, known as an Early Action Reduction Plan, is part of the facility’s required actions under South Coast AQMD’s Rule 1402. The plan includes actions that are more stringent than those listed in the agency’s proposed [order](#) in July 2022.

Sterigenics conducts sterilization of medical equipment using ethylene oxide (EtO) and is located in two buildings between 49th St. and 50th St. on Gifford Ave. in an industrial area in Vernon. The nearest residential area is about 500 feet away, and the nearest school is about 1700 feet away. EtO is a flammable, colorless gas used to sterilize medical equipment and make products, including antifreeze, textiles, solvents, detergents, and adhesives. Long-term exposure to EtO over a number of years increases the risk of certain cancers including lymphoid and breast cancer.

Shortly after South Coast AQMD’s investigation began, Sterigenics implemented operational changes that reduced EtO levels, however data shows that levels are still elevated near the Vernon facility. South Coast AQMD’s data showed an elevated cancer risk to off-site workers. This was determined using methods established by the State of California, assuming long-term (25+ years) exposure. Since May 2022, air monitoring data at the nearest residential area and school remain within typical background levels.

The enforceable plan, approved today, requires the facility to:

- Immediately upgrade air pollution controls to further reduce EtO emissions.
- Immediately install temporary enclosures and complete construction of a Permanent Total Enclosure (PTE) within two years that will prevent emissions from escaping the buildings.
- Implement a robust air monitoring plan with monitors at four locations around the facility.
- Conduct an enhanced leak detection and repair system.

In addition, the plan sets a temporary threshold for EtO emissions from the facility which will remain in place while the facility implements the actions in the plan. Should air monitoring results near the facility show one EtO value at 17.5 parts per billion (ppb) or higher, the facility must curtail operations. Repeated exceedances of the threshold will result in a temporary shutdown of the facility. Once the plan is fully implemented, EtO levels are expected to be well below the interim threshold.

In July, South Coast AQMD sought an order from the agency's independent Hearing Board that was not approved. Today's Early Action Reduction Plan includes an enforceable schedule and a stricter trigger for curtailment than recommended by any member of the agency's Hearing Board in July. Because of that, South Coast AQMD is withdrawing its original petition with the Hearing Board.

In June 2022, South Coast AQMD designated Sterigenics as a Potentially High-Risk Level Facility under its Rule 1402, requiring the facility to implement measures to reduce toxic emissions as quickly as possible. In addition to today's plan, Sterigenics is also required to prepare a Health Risk Assessment that determines a facility's potential health risk impacts to the surrounding community as well as a final Risk Reduction Plan.

The agency has also begun rulemaking efforts that will result in stricter requirements to minimize EtO emissions from sterilization facilities throughout the Basin.

For a copy of the Early Action Reduction Plan, as well as more information on South Coast AQMD's investigation at the Sterigenics facility in Vernon, please visit: www.aqmd.gov/sterigenics.

For more information on South Coast AQMD's investigation into facilities that use EtO, please visit: www.aqmd.gov/eto.

South Coast AQMD is the regulatory agency responsible for improving air quality for large areas of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties, including the Coachella Valley. For news, air quality alerts, event updates and more, please visit us at www.aqmd.gov, download our award-winning app, or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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