

# Goodman dominates Equity Jeff Award nominations

Court Theatre has strong showing while Steppenwolf finds little favor with single nod

A+E

# Chicago Tribune

UNLIMITED DIGITAL ACCESS  
SUBSCRIBER EXCLUSIVE COVERAGE  
EXPANDED SPORTS COVERAGE



QUESTIONS? CALL 1-800-TRIBUNE

TUESDAY, AUGUST 28, 2018

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

# U.S. reaches trade deal with Mexico

Canada expected to return to bargaining table this week; Trump says deal will proceed regardless

By DON LEE, KATE LINTHICUM AND PATRICK J. McDONNELL  
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration has reached a deal with Mexico on a rewrite of the North American Free Trade Agreement, but the two sides now need a quick buy-in from Canada,

which still has significant issues with some of President Donald Trump's demands.

The preliminary agreement with Mexico, which includes a tightening of auto rules to increase production in North America, was struck after several weeks of talks and a marathon session over the weekend in Washington.

Trump announced the deal in

the White House in front of reporters and called Mexico's outgoing president, Enrique Peña Nieto, to congratulate him on the agreement. Trump, putting Peña Nieto on a speaker in the Oval Office, said the agreement "makes it a much more fair bill." He suggested renaming NAFTA as the U.S.-Mexico Trade Agreement.

Though Trump characterized the agreement as a bilateral deal that will proceed with or without Canada, Peña Nieto said repeat-

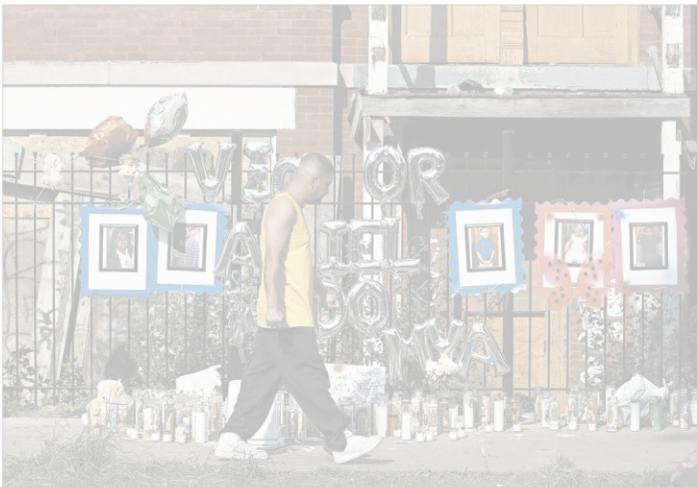
edly he hoped and expected Canada would come on board. Peña Nieto said on Twitter that he had spoken with Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and "expressed the importance of (Trudeau's) re-joining the process, with the goal of concluding a trilateral negotiation this week."

Inside: After criticism, White House lowers flag again for Sen. McCain. *Nation & World, Page 8*

Luis Videgaray, Mexico's foreign minister, said at a press conference at the Mexican Embassy in Washington that while Mexico wants Canada incorporated into the talks, the terms of the U.S.-Mexico deal would stand if for some reason Canada and the U.S. can't work out an agreement.

In Ottawa, Adam Austin, a spokesman for Canada's Minister of Foreign Affairs Chrystia Freeland, said in a statement: "Given

Turn to Trade, Page 10



ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

A memorial has been created near the house where nine children were killed in a fire Sunday in the 2200 block of South Sacramento.

# Deadly fire claims life of 9th child

Investigators looking at fireworks, smoking materials as possible causes of Little Village blaze

By ELVIA MALAGON, ELYSSA GIBNEY, MORGAN GREENE  
Chicago Tribune

Investigators were examining forensic evidence Monday to determine whether a blaze on Chicago's West Side that authorities say killed nine children was started on an enclosed porch by fireworks or smoking materials, such as a cigarette, according to a

fire official.

Cesar Contreras, 14, originally survived the fire Sunday but died Monday evening at Stroger Hospital, according to the Cook County medical examiner's office. One other 14-year-old boy remains hospitalized. Officials said his condition was too critical for investigators to interview him about what happened.

There was evidence of both

fireworks and smoking materials at the scene, said Larry Langford, Chicago Fire Department spokesman. Officials have ruled out electrical problems at the Little Village residence as a possible fire source based on the findings of an engineer with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, he said.

ATF referred questions about the blaze to the Chicago Fire Department.

Once a cause is determined, Langford said investigators will look at whether the fire was an

accident or intentionally set.

Firefighters were called just before 4 a.m. Sunday to the 2200 block of South Sacramento Avenue. Officials believe the fire started in an enclosed porch at the back of the rear building, Langford said.

Relatives said all nine who died ranged from 3 months to 16 years old, most of whom were first cousins.

Krystle Sauseida, 31, said she is an aunt to many of the victims.

Turn to Fire, Page 7

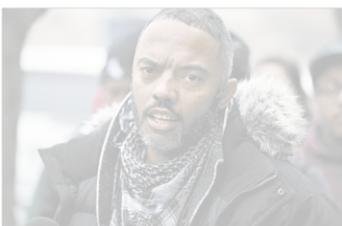
# After 50 years of protests — are they doing any good?

From the '68 DNC to today, activists fighting the same power

By ESE OLUMHENSE, MORGAN GREENE  
Chicago Tribune

Political machines whose players are more interested in keeping the engines running than ending the wars in their backyards and abroad. Flagrant racism and longstanding prejudice that keep some communities locked in a cycle of poverty and crime. And a sense of distrust, and disillusionment, about authority — including police.

The issues that have propelled left-leaning activists to the streets this summer to shut down traffic on the Dan Ryan Expressway and Lake Shore Drive echo what motivated thousands of Yippies and hippies to protest at the 1968



TERENCE ANTONIO JAMES/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Black Lives Matter Chicago activist Kofi Admola: "In some instances, one could argue the conditions have gotten worse."

Democratic National Convention in Chicago, a violent flashpoint in an already tumultuous decade.

But no matter the era, critics, newcomers and aging activists

alike are still asking: What good do protests really do?

A more certain Tribune reporter 50 years ago offered this: "Those who attended the Chi-

cago convention may not treasure their memories but they will be able to boast that they witnessed the end of a political era." That he, or anyone else, thought the riots would upend politics as usual, was probably a bit naive.

"Here we are in 2018 and we're literally fighting for the same things," said local activist Kofi Ademola of Black Lives Matter Chicago. "The conditions have not improved on the South and West sides of Chicago, and in some instances, one could argue the conditions have gotten worse."

Inching progress hasn't stopped today's activist groups, whose members demand elected leaders do something about police misconduct, better fund public schools and improve neighborhoods where gang violence has taken hold. Some are jumping

Turn to Activism, Page 5

# DuPage cancer risk linked to Rauner

EPA: Toxic gas from company owned by governor's former firm

By MICHAEL HAWTHORNE  
Chicago Tribune

Two low-slung industrial buildings, tucked behind a Target store in west suburban Willowbrook, are about as nondescript as they come. For years, they have been home to Sterigenics International, a company that has quietly gone about its business of fumigating medical instruments, pharmaceutical drugs and food to kill bacteria and pests.

But a new federal study is putting a bright spotlight on the company, finding that people living nearby face some of the nation's highest cancer risks from toxic air pollution.

A gas used by the company, ethylene oxide, is far more dangerous than previously thought, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In one census tract near the plant, the EPA estimates the risk of cancer is more than nine times the national average.

Another federal agency concluded the cancer risks could be significantly higher.

Federal officials began investigating Sterigenics last year after surrounding communities popped out on a national map of health hazards from breathing toxic chemicals.

The company also stands out because since 2011 it has been owned by a private equity firm co-founded by Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner, who left the firm a year later to begin campaigning for public office.

About 19,000 people in southeast DuPage County live within a mile of the Willowbrook facility. Four schools and a day care center also are close by, including Hinsdale South High School in Darien and Gower Middle School in Burr Ridge.

Local officials have been ree-

Turn to Cancer, Page 7



ZBISNEW BZDAK/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

# The difficult path to closure for Hadiya's parents, family

Hadiya Pendleton's mother, Cleopatra Cowley, above, and father open up about the grueling trial that put them face-to-face with the gritty details of their 15-year-old daughter's death. *Chicagoland, Page 4*

Police: North Side man kills 10-year-old son, daughter before shooting self *Chicagoland, Page 4*



Tom Skilling's forecast High 92 Low 68

Chicago Weather Center: Complete forecast on back page of A+E section

\$2.50 city and suburbs, \$3.00 elsewhere  
178t year No. 240 © Chicago Tribune



# Kids were 3 months to 16 years old

Fire, from Page 1

The cousins included: Amayah Almaraz, 3 months old; Alanni Ayala, 3; Gialanni Ayala, 5; Ariel Garcia, 5; Giovanni Ayala, 10; Xavier Contreras, 11; Nathan Contreras, 13; and Cesar Contreras, 14. Victor Mendoza, 16, a close family friend, also died in the fire.

On Monday, the medical examiner's office performed autopsies on eight of the victims. In each case, the cause and manner of death were listed as pendrago. Authorities had initially reported that at least one of those injured in the fire was an adult. The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services is investigating allegations of neglect involving the children, Alissandra Calderon, a spokeswoman for the agency, said in an email. The agency had prior contact with three families involved in the fire, but none were under investigation at the time of the fire, said Calderon, who refused to say what the results of the agency's prior investigations were.

As the vigil resumed Monday evening on Sacramento Avenue, at least 200 people mingled on the block, with police standing watch on the north and south ends. Red and white candle wax spilled onto the sidewalk, hardening as it pooled.

Several boys and Benny Estrada leaned against a silver Acura SUV parked alongside a row of white crosses surrounded by flickering candles and commemorative tokens, talking about their friend, Xavier Contreras.

"We were at Limas Park — did I show you this?" Estrada asked the boys. They crowded together to look at his phone.

"He finally did it!" one of the boys said, grinning wide.

On the screen, in a white T-shirt and gray joggers, the 11-year-old Xavier sat in a swing, gripping its chains, his legs pumping against a dark sky. He swung back and forth, gaining momentum. Then he flipped, his black sneakers rotating over his head. Midair, he let go of the swing, his legs coming back underneath his body as he landed on his feet. His palms touched the ground for just a second as he stumbled forward, but he didn't fall.

Days before his death, at a community barbecue at the park at Trumbull Avenue and 24th Street, Xavier mastered the trick he'd been working on over the summer. Seeming confident, he asked Estrada to record the attempt, Estrada said.

"He's like, 'Record me, record me,'" Estrada said. "I told him not to hit his head."

Along a fence bordering the sidewalk hung posters, photographs and shiny balloons spelling out the children's names. Messages of love and memories decorated the posters.

"We love you watch over us," read one.

"I remember all the fun times we had together," read another.

And, "I (hear) you best friend." Fire investigators who have been combing the scene have found no evidence of smoke detectors where the children were sleeping, Langford said.

"Had there been working smoke detectors, the death toll would have been less or nonexistent," he said.

Alice Gutierrez, who is related to the owner of the building, said



Chicago firefighters pass out smoke detectors Monday to residents in the Little Village neighborhood.

## Donations for families sought as Little Village responds to fire

By ELVIA MALAGON  
Chicago Tribune

Community groups and churches are trying to raise at least \$150,000 as the close-knit Little Village neighborhood responds to a horrific fire over the weekend that killed nine children.

The victims have not been officially identified, but relatives said the children ranged in age from 3 months to 16 years old. One boy, 14, remained in critical condition at Stroger Hospital.

The children included cousins and an unrelated teen who was a close friend, according to Krystle Sauseda, 31, who said she was an aunt of many of the victims. They were at a sleepover in an apartment in the 2200 block of South Sacramento Avenue when the fire broke out early Sunday morning.

It is the deadliest fire in Chicago in more than a decade, according to city officials.

At least three GoFundMe campaigns have been launched to help affected families.

One, by the community group La Villita Chi, had raised more than \$20,000 of its goal of \$50,000 as of Monday evening. On its GoFundMe site, the group said donations could also be "dropped off at the Amor De Dios Church at 2336 S. Sawyer Ave., not far from where the fire took place."

Another group, Enlace Chicago, had raised more than \$9,000 of its goal of \$100,000 as of Monday evening. The group, which sponsors educational, health and anti-violence programs, is also collecting dona-

tions such as hygiene items and household items at 2329 S. Troy St. and 2756 S. Harding Ave.

Separately, a fundraising page was set up for victim Victor Mendoza, 16. He was a close friend of the family who attended the sleepover but was not related to the other victims. The page had raised by Monday evening more than \$800 out of a \$5,000 goal to help pay for funeral arrangements.

Victor loved taking care of his little nephew Benji, 2, and was "wonderful" with kids, said his relative, Lily Leon-Ojeda, who created the page.

As many as 14 households were affected by Sunday's fire, according to a news release from Enlace. Some of the children who died in the fire had attended a pop-up barbecue on their block on Friday, and the families participated in various community programs.

"There are several families impacted by this tragic event, including two mothers who lost children, and numerous families that have lost their homes or loved ones," according to the Enlace news release.

Esperanza Health Centers in the neighborhood are offering mental health services to anyone who needs to speak to someone, according to the news release.

"The family needs to know that the arms of Chicago are enfolding them," said Mary Porod, principal of Queen of the Universe Catholic School who grew up in Little Village. "There are many people who want to support them and hold them in prayer."

Porod said she watched the news to see if anyone she knew

had died or been hurt. On Monday, a grandparent of two students informed officials at the West Lawn school that they were related to the children who died in the fire. "The thing is, you don't realize how we are connected until tragedy strikes," Porod said.

One of the students who is related to the family told a teacher that his family keeps crying. For now, Porod said she made a donation to a GoFundMe page for the family and planned to share it with the school's community.

By Monday afternoon, the Amor De Dios Church, less than a mile from the fire scene, had already amassed dozens of bags of clothing, toys and other household items for the surviving relatives of those killed in Sunday's fire.

Gifts in white plastic shopping bags of items donated on Monday had already piled in the entryway and were expected to be displayed on tables at the church for the survivors to choose from Tuesday.

The donations "come from neighbors sharing what they have extra. They are in pain and they're trying to help," Rodriguez said.

The church also plans to turn over cash to help pay funeral costs, he said.

Chicago Tribune's William Lee contributed.

the owner is seeking an attorney because he had installed smoke detectors in the apartment about four months ago.

The home had two bedrooms, but some of the children were asleep in the living room area, Langford said. Some of the chil-

dren lived in the home, while others were visiting for a sleepover. No one was found on the porch.

"Had there been working smoke detectors, the death toll would have been less or nonexistent."

—Larry Langford, Fire Department spokesman

Multiple detectives have been assigned to the "death investigation" because of the number of victims.

Public records show a history of poor conditions at the Sacramento property.

Tenants have filed multiple complaints with the city's 311 service since at least 2015 over problems with bedbugs, doors falling off hinges and sinking floors, records show.

One complaint from October 2015 said, "RATS AND BED BUGS IN COACH HOUSE AND THE LANDLORD WILL NOT DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT."

Records show that matter led to a hearing, but information on the results of the hearing wasn't immediately available.

Separately, the city sent a notice of violation to the property owner in August 2015 over a complaint of an apartment was "infested with bed bugs, doors are falling off the hinges, tile coming up off the kitchen floor," records show.

Last year, complaints about bedbugs and other unsafe conditions in May and August were closed by city inspectors, who found no violations, records show.

Most recently, the property came to the city's attention in June when a tenant complained, said Gregg Cunningham, a spokesman for the city's Buildings Department.

The department inspected the building June 8 and found two electrical code violations, Cunningham said.

One of the violations was for an extension cord that ran from the rear building to the main apartment, according to the city's legal filings. The other was for electrical grounding that caused a basement tenant to get shocked from a tub faucet, the filings said.

That case was set for a court date in late September.

The landlord, records show, also owns at least one more apartment in Little Village, for which he's also been disciplined. In 2014, the city issued violations for a unit in the 2300 block of South Drake Avenue that didn't have a carbon monoxide detector, was kept at low temperatures, didn't have a working space heater and didn't have hot water, court records show.

In response, a court-ordered heat receiver made more than \$2,000 worth of repairs to the apartment, which the landlord paid for.

The owner has been "cooperative" in addressing previous violations, according to a city spokesperson.

Several community groups have created fundraising campaigns to help the family. Enlace Chicago created an online campaign fund for the family and is collecting items at 2329 S. Troy St. and 2756 S. Harding Ave.

emalagon@chicagotribune.com  
mrgreene@chicagotribune.com

## Cancer risk linked to Rauner's former firm

Cancer, from Page 1

ing since the EPA privately shared the Sterigenics study with them last week. The agency posted it online without notice late Friday.

"For the past several days I have been working non-stop with village trustees and administrators — reaching out to local, state and federal officials and assembling a task force to help us interpret the report," Willowbrook Mayor Frank Trilla said Monday in a statement on the village's website.

Ethylene oxide, a key ingredient in the manufacturing of other chemicals, also has been used for decades as fumigant to sterilize heat-sensitive medical equipment and other goods. The volatile, easily absorbed chemical has been on the federal list of carcinogens since 1985, and in December 2016 the EPA released a long-delayed reassessment linking it more conclusively to breast and blood cancer.

Shortly after that, the agency began updating its semi-regular National Air Toxics Assessment, a screening tool used to identify areas where more investigation is needed.

Based largely on the updated

dangers of exposure to ethylene oxide, the EPA concluded that seven census tracts around the Sterigenics plant in Willowbrook have cancer risks high enough to trigger the agency's concern.

The Willowbrook tracts are among 109 nationwide with cancer risk scores greater than 100, meaning if 1 million people were exposed to the same level of pollution throughout their lives (24 hours a day, for 70 years), 100 of them would likely develop cancer.

Most of the other tracts are in "Cancer Alley," an infamous stretch of chemical plants along the Mississippi River in Louisiana.

After the EPA looked more closely at Sterigenics and measured ethylene oxide levels in nearby residential areas, a related federal health agency determined the cancer risks in southeast DuPage could be orders of magnitude higher than initially estimated: up to 6,400 per million, or more than 6 cases of cancer for every 1,000 people.

"This is just staggering," said Peter Orris, a veteran occupational and environmental medicine researcher at the University of Illinois at Chicago, who for years has been pushing hospitals

to stop using ethylene oxide. "They shouldn't be using this chemical as a sterilizer because it can't be controlled."

A spokeswoman for Sterigenics' parent company said executives are still reviewing the newly released study. The company called the use of ethylene oxide "a critical step ... to protect patients who use these products from harmful bacteria that could cause infection or death."

At the EPA's behest, the company installed new equipment in July intended to reduce the Willowbrook plant's pollution. Federal officials, along with the Illinois EPA, haven't determined yet if the controls are effective.

For now the company is working voluntarily with the agencies. The last enforcement action against the Willowbrook plant was in 2013, when the Illinois EPA discovered an ethylene oxide leak while investigating a chemical spill near the facility. Sterigenics later paid a \$50,000 fine.

It appears the Willowbrook facility's air pollution does not pose the type of immediate health threats seen in some work settings, the U.S. EPA said in a statement. The federal agency also said it is reviewing ethylene oxide emissions at other facilities across the country and is considering an overhaul of national air quality regulations to address heightened concerns about the chemical.

"EPA is working closely with

Willowbrook to address any community concerns," said Cathy Stepp, the regional EPA administrator.

The Willowbrook facility is one of nine ethylene oxide sterilizers operated nationally by Sterigenics, which has grown rapidly since it was bought out in 2011 by GTCR, the private equity firm formed by Rauner and a colleague during the late 1990s after dissolving another firm with the same name.

Rauner retired as chairman of GTCR in 2012 as he began laying the groundwork for his successful 2014 bid for governor; he has said his current investments have been delegated to a power of attorney.

Sterigenics is now owned by Sotera, a Cleveland-based venture between GTCR and Warburg Pincus, another private equity firm that acquired a majority stake in 2015.

The company's website says its name was inspired by Sotera, the Greek goddess of safety, "and reflects the Company's unwavering commitment to global health."

Neither the Rauner campaign nor the governor's office answered detailed questions from the Tribune.

The area is represented in Springfield by House Minority Leader Jim Durkin, a Darien Republican who said he is working with state and federal officials "to ascertain the facts and formulate next steps to ensure the

safety of Willowbrook residents and the residents of surrounding communities."

Reevaluating hazards posed by toxic chemicals often leads to conclusions that widely used substances are more dangerous than once thought. Yet the federal government can take years to publish risk assessments based on the latest science, largely because of industry opposition and bureaucratic inertia.

When a federal judge ordered the EPA to update its ethylene oxide regulations during the mid-2000s, the agency said it needed to wait for a new assessment of the dangers — the one finally published in 2016.

Regulations on toxic substances are even more difficult to enact. For instance, the government still hasn't banned asbestos, a well-documented carcinogen that has killed thousands of people who suffered devastating lung diseases.

President Donald Trump's first budget would have gutted the EPA program that produced the new ethylene oxide assessment, and the administration has moved to roll back or delay several environment, health and safety regulations. The Republican-controlled Congress also has moved several times to eliminate funding for the chemical assessment program, though for now it continues to operate.

mshawhorne@chicagotribune.com  
Twitter @scrib99y

# Chicago Tribune

Aug. 28, 2018

## DuPage cancer risk linked to Rauner

EPA: Toxic gas from company owned by governor's former firm

By Michael Hawthorne

Two low-slung industrial buildings, tucked behind a Target store in west suburban Willowbrook, are about as nondescript as they come. For years, they have been home to Sterigenics International, a company that has quietly gone about its business of fumigating medical instruments, pharmaceutical drugs and food to kill bacteria and pests.

But a new federal study is putting a bright spotlight on the company, finding that people living nearby face some of the nation's highest cancer risks from toxic air pollution.

A gas used by the company, ethylene oxide, is far more dangerous than previously thought, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In one census tract near the plant, the EPA estimates the risk of cancer is more than nine times the national average.

Another federal agency concluded the cancer risks could be significantly higher.

Federal officials began investigating Sterigenics last year after surrounding communities popped out on a national map of health hazards from breathing toxic chemicals.

The company also stands out because since 2011 it has been owned by a private equity firm co-founded by Illinois Gov. Bruce Rauner, who left the firm a year later to begin campaigning for public office.

About 19,000 people in southeast DuPage County live within a mile of the Willowbrook facility. Four schools and a day care center also are close by, including Hinsdale South High School in Darien and Gower Middle School in Burr Ridge.

Local officials have been reeling since the EPA privately shared the Sterigenics study with them last week. The agency posted it online without notice late Friday.

"For the past several days I have been working non-stop with village trustees and administrators -- reaching out to local, state and federal officials and assembling a task force to help us interpret the report," Willowbrook Mayor Frank Trilla said Monday in a statement on the village's website.

Neither the Rauner campaign nor the governor's office answered detailed questions from the Tribune. On Tuesday, Rauner criticized federal officials for releasing the Sterigenics report without explaining it to the public.

"This is not an emergency. This is not a public health immediate crisis. This is something we are managing," Rauner told reporters after a bill-signing event in Chicago. "We are going to work with the federal government to monitor this whole situation ... and try to reduce exposures from this as much as we can."

Ethylene oxide, a key ingredient in the manufacturing of other chemicals, also has been used for decades as fumigant to sterilize heat-sensitive medical equipment and other goods.

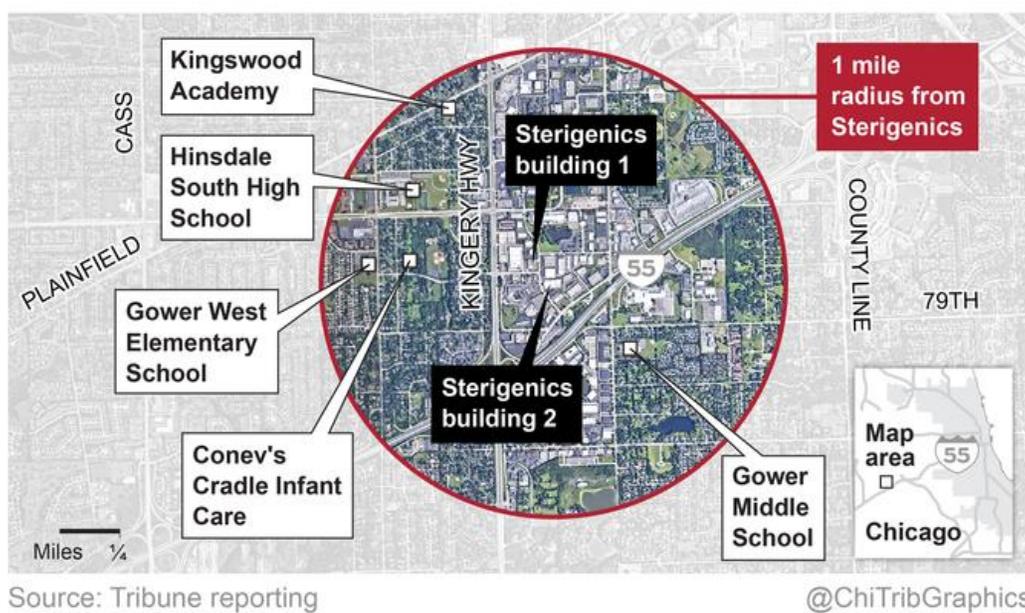
The volatile, easily absorbed chemical has been on the federal list of carcinogens since 1985, and in December 2016 the EPA released a long-delayed reassessment linking it more conclusively to breast and blood cancer.

Shortly after that, the agency began updating its semi-regular National Air Toxics Assessment, a screening tool used to identify areas where more investigation is needed.

Based largely on the updated dangers of exposure to ethylene oxide, the EPA concluded that seven census tracts around the Sterigenics plant in Willowbrook have cancer risks high enough to trigger the agency's concern.

The Willowbrook tracts are among 109 nationwide with cancer risk scores greater than 100, meaning if 1 million people were exposed to the same level of pollution throughout their lives (24 hours a day, for 70 years), 100 of them would likely develop cancer.

Most of the other tracts are in "Cancer Alley," an infamous stretch of chemical plants along the Mississippi River in Louisiana.



After the EPA looked more closely at Sterigenics and measured ethylene oxide levels in nearby residential areas, a related federal health agency determined the cancer risks in southeast DuPage could be orders of magnitude higher than initially estimated: up to 6,400 per million, or more than 6 cases of cancer for every 1,000 people.

"This is just staggering," said Peter Orris, a veteran occupational and environmental medicine researcher at the University of Illinois at Chicago, who for years has been pushing hospitals to stop using ethylene oxide. "They shouldn't be using this chemical as a sterilizer because it can't be controlled."

A spokeswoman for Sterigenics' parent company said executives are still reviewing the newly released study.

The company called the use of ethylene oxide "a critical step ... to protect patients who use these products from harmful bacteria that could cause infection or death."

At the EPA's behest, the company installed new equipment in July intended to reduce the Willowbrook plant's pollution. Federal officials, along with the Illinois EPA, haven't determined yet if the controls are effective.

For now the company is working voluntarily with the agencies. The last enforcement action against the Willowbrook plant was in 2013, when the Illinois EPA discovered an ethylene oxide leak while investigating a chemical spill near the facility. Sterigenics later paid a \$50,000 fine.

It appears the Willowbrook facility's air pollution does not pose the type of immediate health threats seen in some work settings, the U.S. EPA said in a statement. The federal agency also said it is reviewing ethylene oxide emissions at other facilities across the country and is considering an overhaul of national air quality regulations to address heightened concerns about the chemical.

"EPA is working closely with Willowbrook to address any community concerns," said Cathy Stepp, the regional EPA administrator.

The Willowbrook facility is one of nine ethylene oxide sterilizers operated nationally by Sterigenics, which has grown rapidly since it was bought out in 2011 by GTCR, the private equity firm formed by Rauner and a colleague during the late 1990s after dissolving another firm with the same name.

Rauner retired as chairman of GTCR in 2012 as he began laying the groundwork for his successful 2014 bid for governor; he has said his current investments have been delegated to a power of attorney.

Sterigenics is now owned by Sotera, a Cleveland-based venture between GTCR and Warburg Pincus, another private equity firm that acquired a majority stake in 2015.

The company's website says its name was inspired by Soteria, the Greek goddess of safety, "and reflects the Company's unwavering commitment to global health."

The area is represented in Springfield by House Minority Leader Jim Durkin, a Darien Republican who said he is working with state and federal officials "to ascertain the facts and formulate next steps to ensure the safety of Willowbrook residents and the residents of surrounding communities."

Reevaluating hazards posed by toxic chemicals often leads to conclusions that widely used substances are more dangerous than once thought. Yet the federal government can take years to publish risk assessments based on the latest science, largely because of industry opposition and bureaucratic inertia.

When a federal judge ordered the EPA to update its ethylene oxide regulations during the mid-2000s, the agency said it needed to wait for a new assessment of the dangers -- the one finally published in 2016.

Regulations on toxic substances are even more difficult to enact. For instance, the government still hasn't banned asbestos, a well-documented carcinogen that has killed thousands of people who suffered devastating lung diseases.

President Donald Trump's first budget would have gutted the EPA program that produced the new ethylene oxide assessment, and the administration has moved to roll back or delay several environment, health and safety regulations.

The Republican-controlled Congress also has moved several times to eliminate funding for the chemical assessment program, though for now it continues to operate.