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Looking to giving to get a tax break



WHITE SOX ROLL

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Early Edition

Chicago Tribune



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SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2018

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM



CHRIS SWEDA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Fatima Idris, Osama Omarein, Abdel Hamid Omarein and Fadl Omarein chat with relatives in Lebanon from their Chicago apartment.

Chicago's refugee agencies struggle amid disruptions

Number of people allowed into country drops, U.S. ends some programs

By Tessa Weinberg and Nausheen Husain
Chicago Tribune

The sign, in English, was a simple "Welcome."
But for Fatima Idris, whose father and brother were killed and whose apartment was bombed in her war-torn home of Syria, it symbolized a new life. Maybe one not so steeped in grief, here in Chicago.

ROHINGYA FAMILY: Refugees put down roots in Chicago, yearn for loved ones left behind. **Chicagoland, Page 16**

On that chilly February day in 2015, Idris' main worry was that she wouldn't be accepted in America, for speaking Arabic, for wearing a hijab for being a refugee.
But the sign, and the Catholic

Charities employees who came with it, filled Idris with relief.
"They were everything good from God," Idris said of the refugee resettlement agencies and volunteers who have helped her and her family make a life in the West Rogers Park neighborhood.
Others will not be so lucky. As the number of refugees permitted to enter the United

States has fallen, the agencies that serve them have atrophied.
And with the decline, the U.S. has abandoned its long-time role as a global leader in refugee resettlement. Advocates worry that the world's most vulnerable will no longer be able to seek refuge here, in a country of immigrants. Last
Turn to Refugees, Page 16

Will plant connected to Rauner be closed?

Neighbors urge strong response to polluting site in Willowbrook

By Michael Hawthorne
Chicago Tribune

A company responsible for some of the nation's highest cancer risks from toxic air pollution says its sterilization plant in west suburban Willowbrook operates well within the law.

Also vouching for the company is Republican Gov. Bruce Rauner, a former private equity executive who still has a financial interest in Sterigenics, a global corporation that uses highly potent ethylene oxide gas in Willowbrook and 16 other cities to fumigate medical instruments, pharmaceutical drugs and food.

"This is not an emergency," Rauner said in his only public comments about a federal study released in late August that revealed significant health threats posed by the Willowbrook facility. "My understanding is that particular company has followed all the regulations and the proper procedures."

Air pollution within legal limits can still be dangerous. With the Nov. 6 election just two months away, residents in traditionally Republican communities near Sterigenics are clamoring for a more aggressive response from local, state and federal officials. Yet quick action is unlikely for a variety of reasons.

Turn to Sterigenics, Page 18

PUBLIC HEALTH INQUIRY: Rauner-led Illinois EPA withholds Sterigenics records from attorney general until local Republicans intervene. **Chicagoland, Page 18**

On the hunt for fresh tech talent in Illinois

Chicago companies, as well as Silicon Valley giants, woo students with grandiose gestures to make potential recruits aware of opportunities they offer. **Business**

A year after Maria, ripple effects still felt
Chicagoland, Page 4

Senate panel rejects accuser's key requests
Nation & World, Page 31

Van Dyke defense starts presenting case Monday



ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Chicago police Officer Jason Van Dyke listens Thursday during his trial for the 2014 shooting death of 17-year-old Laquan McDonald.

By Megan Chepeau and Stacy St. Clair
Chicago Tribune

From the opening moments of Chicago police Officer Jason Van Dyke's murder trial, his defense team has sought to paint him as an upstanding cop and family man, a dad who made breakfast for his wife and kids and dutifully fulfilled a "honey-do" list before heading to work on the day his life would change forever.

At the same time, 17-year-old Laquan McDonald was on a "wild rampage through the city," using PCP and threatening bystanders with a knife before crossing paths with Van Dyke, the officer's attorney Daniel Herbert told jurors.

BROADER ISSUES: Police cover-up, official silence loom large over the Van Dyke trial. **Chicagoland, Page 12**

IN THE COURTROOM: The strongest points made by the prosecution and the defense. **Chicagoland, Page 13**

The evidence, Herbert said, would show that Van Dyke had no choice but to shoot a dangerous criminal. Now comes Herbert's best opportunity to make good on that promise as the defense begins presenting evidence Monday.
In order for Van Dyke to walk
Turn to Van Dyke, Page 13

Tom Skilling's forecast High 73 Low 56

Chicago Weather Center: Complete forecast in Nation & World, Page 43

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MARK BLACK/FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Neringa Zymanclus, of Darien, leads a protest at Sterigenics' headquarters in Oak Brook this month. The group was decrying the emissions from the Sterigenics plant in Willowbrook.

Will plant tied to Rauner be closed?

Sterigenics, from Page 1

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Another option is buried in the same permit that allows Sterigenics to pollute surrounding neighborhoods. Written in obscure legal language, it gives Rauner — or President Donald Trump's administration — authority to declare the DuPage County facility a threat to public health and seek a court order to immediately shut it down.

Bipartisan majorities of Congress included provisions in the 1970 Clean Air Act that enable environmental regulators to respond quickly to air pollution emergencies. Legal powers also can be invoked to address cancer-causing pollution, "the harm from which might take many years to manifest itself," according to a guidance memo on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency website.

"Compliance with all federal, state or local permits was never and is not a determination that a facility's operations are 'safe,'" said Bruce Buckheit, a former EPA and U.S. Department of Justice lawyer who oversaw enforcement of air pollution laws during the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The Rauner administration, which has cut back on enforcement of state environmental laws, appears more inclined to work with Sterigenics than take the company to court. Nearly two months before the cancer report was made public, the Illinois EPA quietly gave the Willowbrook facility another permit to voluntarily install new pollution-control equipment, making it more difficult for authorities to pursue legal action against the company unless it can be proved the fix has failed to eliminate health risks from ethylene oxide pollution.

Trump administration officials also appear reluctant to crack down on Sterigenics. "The agency will review its air toxics regulations for facilities that emit ethylene oxide," an EPA spokesman said in a statement. Neither federal nor state regulators have committed to anything beyond overseeing a consultant hired by Sterigenics to gauge the effectiveness of its new pollution controls, and using computer models to analyze the results.

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State EPA withholds Sterigenics records

Governor has financial stake; Republicans' calls get reports moving

By MICHAEL HAWTHORNE
Chicago Tribune

Gov. Bruce Rauner's administration is at odds with the state's chief lawyer again, this time about the public health investigation of a suburban Chicago sterilization plant connected to the governor.

Urged by fellow Republicans to cooperate with Attorney General Lisa Madigan, a Democrat who isn't running for re-election, the Rauner-led Illinois Environmental Protection Agency instead refused in late August to provide Madigan's office with key documents about highly toxic ethylene oxide gas emitted in Willowbrook by Sterigenics, a global sterilization company bought in 2011 by a private equity fund co-founded by Rauner. The governor still has a financial interest in Sterigenics, according to a report he filed in May with a state ethics commission.

After Madigan's office filed another request for Sterigenics records under the Freedom of Information Act, the EPA took more than two weeks to respond, then withheld detailed reports about pollution from Sterigenics during the past two decades, records show.

The reason: Sterigenics had declared the documents are confidential business information.

One of Madigan's top aides said

it is unprecedented for the Illinois EPA to refuse to share information with the office constitutionally obligated to represent state government in legal matters.

"In sum, IEPA has left the decision on whether to provide emissions reports to the attorney general's office to the company that has been and continues to release toxic chemicals into a populated community in DuPage County," Ann Spillane, Madigan's chief of staff, wrote in a letter to three local Republican officials dated Wednesday.

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By contrast, the EPA sent 198 referrals a year on average during former Gov. Rod Blagojevich's first three years in office and 144 during the same time period under former Gov. Pat Quinn, the Tribune analysis found. Rauner's enforcement record also pales in comparison to the same period under the state's last Republican governor, George Ryan, when the Illinois EPA on average referred 201 environmental cases annually to the attorney general.

Messina acknowledged he had received calls Thursday about the Sterigenics dispute from state Rep. Jim Durkin of Darien, the House Republican leader, and state Sen. John Curran, a Downers Grove Republican. Curran and Dan Cronin, chairman of the DuPage County Board, have urged Rauner and Madigan to work together to overhaul the state permit that allows Sterigenics to release ethylene oxide into the air.

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With the Trump administration focused on rolling back environment and safety protections, there is no guarantee federal limits on ethylene oxide emissions will be updated to reflect the latest science. Even under Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, Democrats who have been accused of being overzealous with regulations, the EPA failed to take action on dozens of chemicals with well-documented hazards.

"EPA and other agencies can move fairly quickly when there is a big spill, explosion, or some other visible industrial disaster or derailment," said Eric Schaeffer, who resigned in protest as the EPA's top enforcement official during President George W. Bush's administration and now heads the nonprofit Environmental Integrity Project.

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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.

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Kelleher is among 19,000 people who live roughly a mile from 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 are scrambling to respond to the cancer report, mindful of the political landscape of DuPage County is changing. Once a dependable base of power for Republicans in Illinois, the county has trended more toward Democrats in recent national elections. Hillary Clinton won nearly 54 percent of the DuPage vote in 2016, compared with 39 percent for Donald Trump.

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Chicago Tribune

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Organizer Neringa Zymancius, of Darien, leads protesters in front of the Oak Brook headquarters of Sterigenics on Sept. 14, 2018. (Mark Black/for the Chicago Tribune)

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