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A+E Science fiction's invisible women

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Chicago Tribune



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SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2018

BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

Lake County emissions tied to cancer

Public not warned about ethylene oxide released by Waukegan, Gurnee facilities

By MICHAEL HAWTHORNE Chicago Tribune

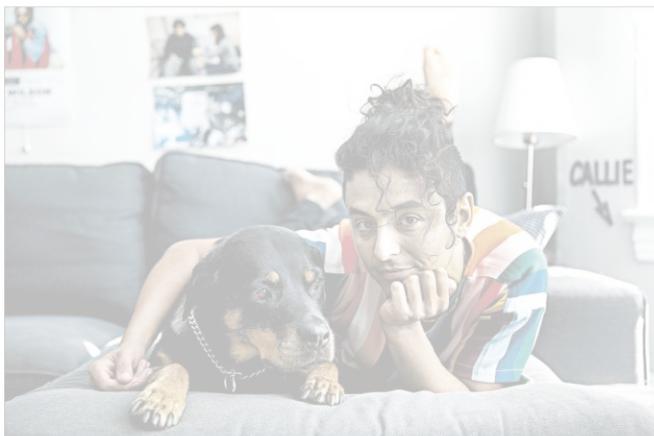
Communities facing abnormally high cancer risks from toxic air pollution stand out on a color-coded map created by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Only a few dozen residential areas nationwide are shaded dark

blue like neighborhoods surrounding the Sterigenics facility in west suburban Willowbrook in DuPage County, where potent ethylene oxide gas escapes from fumigation chambers used to sterilize medical instruments, pharmaceutical drugs and food. Pull back from a tight focus on Willowbrook and another dark blue cluster comes into view

about 40 miles northeast in Lake County. More than 19,000 people live within areas at risk from ethylene oxide emitted by a Medline Industries facility near Interstate 94 in the southwest corner of Waukegan, the interactive map shows. Another facility in Lake County could pose even greater risks than Sterigenics or Medline. Federal and state officials confirmed the only reason it isn't on the map is that someone at the state level

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Sterigenics that year and 3,058 pounds released by Medline. Without the Vantage emissions in its calculations, the EPA dramatically underestimated the dangers to nearly 23,000 people living near the Gurnee chemical plant. None of the findings about Medline and Vantage has been shared with the public until now. "I had no idea what these facilities are putting into the air," said Celeste Flores, a Gurnee Turn to Pollution, Page 16



ERIN HOOLEY/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Chicagoan Pidgeon Pagonis, 32, was born intersex and had multiple surgeries during an era dominated by researcher John Money.

'It's medically sanctioned violence and torture'

Intersex patients call for end to genital surgeries on children

By NARA SCHOENBERG | Chicago Tribune

When Jennifer Pagonis was born in the winter of 1986, her parents brought her home to a wardrobe of pink and white, ruffles and frills. But three months later, Jennifer's mother arrived at the pediatrician's office with what would turn out to be a life-changing question: Did her baby girl's genitals look swollen?

Jennifer was referred to Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago, where doctors ran blood tests and quickly reached a conclusion: Jennifer was one of a tiny number of babies who are born intersex, or with bodies that don't fit standard anatomical definitions of male or

female. She was genetically male — with XY chromosomes and internal testes, but she also had a small vagina and an enlarged clitoris. Doctors told her stunned parents that she could never have children, but with surgery she could look entirely female.

And that was how, at age 4, Jennifer was admitted to what is now Lurie Children's Hospital for cosmetic surgery on her genitals. During a two-hour operation, to which her parents consented, a plastic surgeon cut into Jennifer's clitoris, removing about 2 centimeters of tissue. In a follow-up operation when Pagonis was 11, doctors enlarged her vagina. The result of those two operations, according to Pagonis, now 32, was scarring, loss of sensation, emotional trauma and severe sexual impairment. "No matter Turn to Surgeries, Page 12

Amid talk of wave, Dems turning tide in suburbs

Votes cast there will be key in shaping Illinois' immediate future

By RICK PEARSON, MIKE RIOPELL AND PATRICK M. O'CONNELL Chicago Tribune

In 1995, the suburbs were the center of Illinois' Republican universe, the bucolic backyards the home of the leaders of the state legislature as they strove to drive an agenda as a political force to be reckoned with for future generations. Nearly a quarter-century later, it is the Democrats who have advanced in collar counties that were once the Republican firewall to Chicago's massive Democratic vote — a confluence of changing demographics, uncertain GOP messaging and a partisan map-making process.

While Democrats talk of a "blue wave" sweeping nationally as Election Day approaches on Tuesday, it's clear they've already begun to turn the tide by encroaching into the traditional GOP-leaning suburbs. The votes cast there will be key in determining Illinois' immediate future.

Turn to Suburbs, Page 9

Report: 2nd Amazon HQ could land in Va.

The company has held advanced discussions about placing its second headquarters in Arlington, Va. Nation & World, Page 33



FALL BACK: Daylight saving time ended at 2 a.m. Sunday. Be sure to turn back your clocks one hour.



Tom Skilling's forecast High 55 Low 42

Chicago Weather Center: Complete forecast in Nation & World, Page 45

\$3.99 city and suburbs, \$4.99 elsewhere 171st year No. 308 © Chicago Tribune



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Welcoming our new Chief of Thoracic Surgery, Jessica Downing, MD

# Lake County residents not warned

Pollution, from Page 1

resident who grew up in the area and now lives a mile from Medline and about 2 miles from Vantage.

"I would like to hear more about this from our elected officials," said Flores, the Lake County outreach coordinator for Faith in Place, a nondenominational coalition of religious leaders that focuses on environmental issues. "We need to be just as concerned about our health as we are about jobs and livable wages."

Federal, state and local officials declined to explain why they haven't warned neighbors about the hazards. They also wouldn't say why they haven't responded as urgently as officials did in communities near Sterigenics, despite evidence there are more than twice as many people in Lake County breathing pollution that increases the long-term risks of breast cancer and lymphomas at extremely low levels.

The reluctance to tell the public what insiders already know could soon change if President Donald Trump's administration is forced to conduct another high-profile investigation. Already the Trump EPA has detoured from its push to roll back environmental regulations, vowing it will propose more stringent limits on ethylene oxide early next year.

After the Chicago Tribune began asking officials last month for more information about Medline and Vantage, both of the state's U.S. senators, Democrats Dick Durbin and Tammy Duckworth, and Democratic U.S. Rep. Brad Schneider sent the EPA a letter requesting a Sterigenics-level effort in Lake County. Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan later sent a similar letter to the federal agency.

Duckworth, who serves on a key Senate committee that oversees the EPA, said ethylene oxide is a clear danger to public health and has no place in local communities.

"The fact that Sterigenics and companies in Lake County all appear to be operating within their permits doesn't mean the chemical is any safer," Duckworth said, "but rather shows us that regulations limiting ethylene oxide emissions are woefully inadequate to protect our families and our children."

Durbin released a blistering statement after this story was posted online Friday. "This is simply outrageous," he said. "Day after day, the Rauner and Trump administrations continue to prioritize public relations over serious public health hazards."

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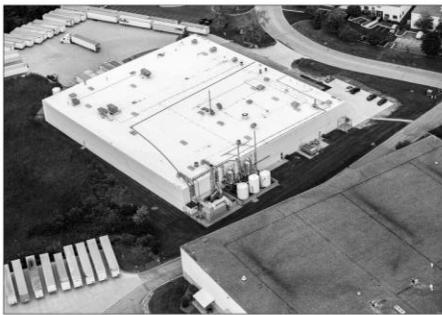
A Tribune analysis of



Nearly 23,000 people live near Vantage Specialty Chemicals in Gurnee, which emits cancer-linked ethylene oxide gas.



Activist and Gurnee resident Celeste Flores lives a mile from the Medline plant and about 2 miles from Vantage. "I had no idea what these facilities are putting into the air"



The Medline Industries plant in Waukegan has largely avoided activists' notice; its emissions are less noticeable than those from a coal-fired power plant along Lake Michigan.

## What is ethylene oxide?

By MICHAEL HAWTHORNE  
Chicago Tribune

Ethylene oxide is a widely used chemical made in the U.S. by some of the industry's global giants, including Dow Chemical, Huntsman, Shell and Union Carbide. Its main use is in the refining of other chemicals, including ethylene glycol, the main ingredient in automobile antifreeze.

A small but significant percentage of ethylene oxide is used by hospitals and corporations to sterilize medical instruments. It also is used to fumigate pharmaceutical drugs and food, in particular spices.

Ralph Landau, a chemical engineer who pioneered a widely used process for making ethylene oxide, later developed a new method to make ethylene glycol that didn't rely on its more troublesome chemical cousin. A company he formed to manufacture products without ethylene oxide founded in the early 1980s.

The dangers of ethylene oxide have been known since at least the late 1970s. In 1985, the National Toxicology

Program, an arm of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, declared that the chemical is "reasonably anticipated to be a human carcinogen." The government scientific agency classified ethylene oxide as a "known human carcinogen" in 2000.

One of the chief studies of its cancer risks involved more than 18,000 workers at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health found that the workers suffered worrisome rates of breast cancer and lymphomas. The study provided the foundation of a draft risk assessment issued in 2006 by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, a document that wasn't formally released until December 2016.

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Twitter @scrtheggy

# Chicago Tribune

Nov. 4, 2018

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By Michael Hawthorne

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Environmental activist Celeste Flores, shown outside her Gurnee home, lives a mile from Medline Industries and about 2 miles from Vantage Specialty Chemicals, both ethylene oxide emitters. (Erin Hooley/Chicago Tribune)

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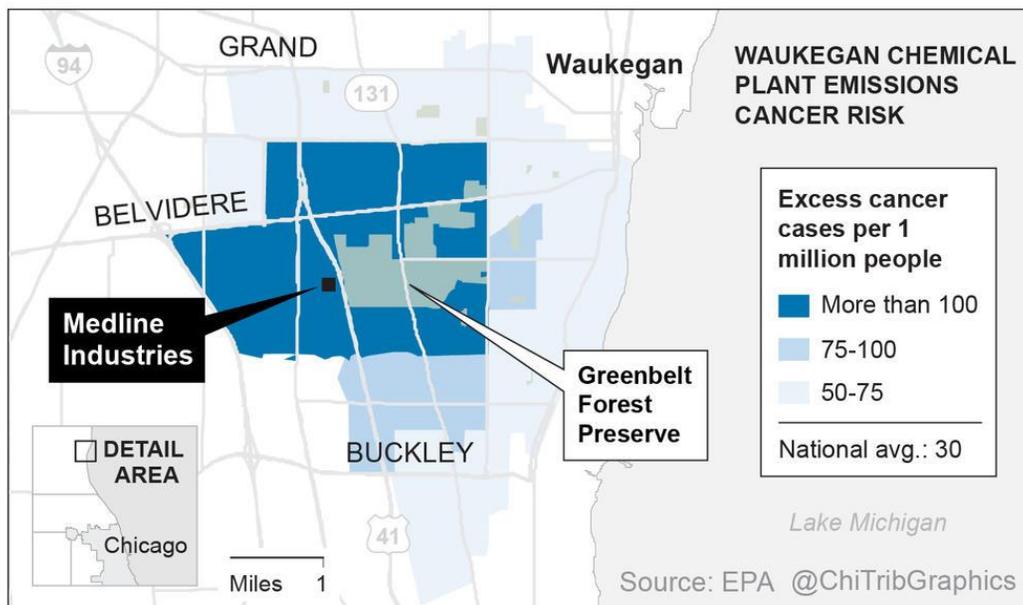
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