U.S. reaches trade deal with Mexico

Canada expects to return to bargaining table this week. Trump says deal will proceed regardless.

By Peter J. Cook / Special to the Tribune

Washington, DC — The Trump administration on Tuesday announced a breakthrough in trade talks with Mexico, which includes a long-sought provision to protect the nation’s supply of medical devices.

The deal would end a six-month dispute between the two trading partners over the fate of the North American Free Trade Agreement, known as NAFTA.

Though Trump characterized the agreement as a “triumph,” there were immediate questions over whether he would follow through with a threat to impose tariffs on Mexican goods.

The deal was announced Tuesday in London, where Trump is meeting with Prime Minister Theresa May.

Trump was scheduled to travel to Canada on Wednesday to finalize the agreement, which would replace NAFTA and include new protections for American auto workers.

In a statement, the White House said Trump would return to the negotiating table this week to discuss the deal.

The administration has been under pressure to reach a deal to avoid the imposition of tariffs on Mexican goods, which could cost the U.S. economy $1 trillion.

The agreement includes a provision to require drug companies to manufacture their products in the U.S. and Mexico.

Deadly fire claims life of 9th child

An investigation into the deadly fire that killed a 9-year-old boy in Chicago has found that the boy died from smoke inhalation.

The boy, identified by his family as A.J. Williams, was found in the basement of the apartment building on the 1000 block of West 47th Place.

A证

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

From the ‘60s DNC to today: activists fighting the same power.

By Susan Janus / Special to the Tribune

Activists have been fighting corporate power for decades, but the landscape has changed.

The internet has made it easier to spread the word and organize protests, but it has also made it easier for corporations to control the narrative.

The Chicago Teachers Union recently announced a plan to organize a nationwide strike on April 1.

Police: North Side man killed 30-year-old son, daughter before shooting self

By Steve Lundy / Special to the Tribune

A man shot and killed his 30-year-old son and daughter before turning the gun on himself.

The incident occurred early Wednesday morning on the 3500 block of North Hermitage Avenue.

The suspect, identified by his family as a 55-year-old man, was pronounced dead at the scene.

The children, identified by police as a 30-year-old woman and a 30-year-old man, were also pronounced dead.

The investigation is ongoing.

DuPage cancer risk linked to Rauner

Ed's, a toxic gas from company owned by governor's former firm

By Mary Costello / Special to the Tribune

A new study has linked the presence of Ed's, a toxic gas from a company owned by the governor's former firm, to a higher risk of cancer.

Ed's, a toxic gas from a company owned by the governor's former firm, has been linked to a higher risk of cancer.

The study, published in the Journal of Environmental Health, found that exposure to Ed's was associated with an increased risk of cancer.

The study, published in the Journal of Environmental Health, found that exposure to Ed's was associated with an increased risk of cancer.
Kids were 3 months to 16 years old

Donations for families sought as Little Village responds to fire

By EVA MALONE

Community groups and businesses in Little Village are hoping to raise at least $10,000 for a child who was killed in a house fire on Wednesday.

The living room had been set on fire by a child after a cigarette was left unattended. The child was taken to the hospital and is in stable condition.

Firefighters and police are still investigating the cause of the fire.

The donations will be used to help the family of the child who was killed. The family has lost everything in the fire.

Community groups and individuals interested in donating can contact the Little Village Community Trust at 773-423-4700. Donations can be made online at littlevillagecommunitytrust.org.

Cancer risk linked to Rauner's former firm

Cancer, from page 9

The EPA is planning to announce today that it will not allow any new construction of gas plants in the country, which would likely mean an end to gas plant construction in Illinois.

The EPA is also planning to announce a new rule that will require power plants to reduce their carbon dioxide emissions by 30 percent by 2030.

The rule is expected to cost the country around $30 billion in new investments, but the EPA estimates that it will save about $43 billion in other costs, including health care and lost productivity.

The move comes after several months of negotiations between the EPA and the industry.

Environmental groups have been critical of the EPA's decision, saying it will do little to address the climate crisis. They say the new rule is a major step back in the fight against climate change.

The EPA's decision is likely to face legal challenges from the industry, as well as from some states and environmental groups.

Finalists in the EPA's policy awards program include the Sierra Club, the American Lung Association, and the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The awards will be announced later this week.

---

Some of the biggest players in the industry have been critical of the EPA's decision, saying it will do little to address the climate crisis. They say the new rule is a major step back in the fight against climate change.

The EPA's decision is likely to face legal challenges from the industry, as well as from some states and environmental groups.

Finalists in the EPA's policy awards program include the Sierra Club, the American Lung Association, and the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The awards will be announced later this week.

---

Some of the biggest players in the industry have been critical of the EPA's decision, saying it will do little to address the climate crisis. They say the new rule is a major step back in the fight against climate change.

The EPA's decision is likely to face legal challenges from the industry, as well as from some states and environmental groups.

Finalists in the EPA's policy awards program include the Sierra Club, the American Lung Association, and the Natural Resources Defense Council.

The awards will be announced later this week.
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 a 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.