

## **FACT SHEET**

### **FINAL AIR TOXICS STANDARDS FOR HOSPITAL STERILIZERS**

#### **ACTION**

- On December 20, 2007,, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued standards to reduce emissions of ethylene oxide from hospital sterilizers.
- At hospital sterilizers, ethylene oxide is used to sterilize medical equipment. Today's final action covers all facilities nationwide.
- The Clean Air Act defines two types of stationary sources that emit air toxics: major sources and area sources. This rule regulates hospital sterilizers as area sources.
- Area sources are smaller commercial and industrial operations that release lesser quantities of toxic pollutants into the air. Area sources emit less than 10 tons per year of a single air toxic, or less than 25 tons per year of a combination of air toxics. Sources that emit more than these amounts are characterized as "major" sources.
- This final rule is a part of the 1999 Urban Air Toxics Strategy to reduce air toxics in all areas of the country. Congress required EPA to develop this Strategy in the Clean Air Act.
- This final action requires hospitals to implement a management practice to reduce ethylene oxide emissions by sterilizing full loads to the extent practicable. Hospitals which route ethylene oxide to a control device are in compliance with the rule requirements.
- EPA estimates that the final rule will prevent 2 to 9 tons per year of ethylene oxide emissions nationwide from 1,900 hospitals at a cost of less than \$100,000 per year.

#### **BACKGROUND**

- The Clean Air Act requires EPA to identify categories of industrial sources that emit one or more of 187 listed toxic air pollutants. These industrial categories include both major and area sources.
- For major sources within each source category, the Clean Air Act requires EPA to develop standards that restrict emissions to levels consistent with the lowest-emitting (also called best-performing) plants. Major sources are those that emit 10 tons a year or more of a single toxic air pollutant or 25 tons a year or more of a combination of air toxics.
- For area sources within each source category, the Clean Air Act allows EPA to develop standards or requirements which provide for the use of generally available control technologies (GACT) or management practices rather than the maximum achievable control technology (MACT) required for major sources.

- Further, the Clean Air Act requires EPA to (1) identify the toxic air pollutants that pose the greatest threat to public health in urban areas and (2) identify and list the area source categories that represent 90 percent of the emissions of the urban air toxics associated with area sources and regulate them to ensure that the emissions of these “urban” air toxics are reduced. EPA implements these requirements through the Integrated Urban Air Toxics Strategy.
- EPA published the Strategy on July 19, 1999, in the *Federal Register* that included:
  - A list of the 33 air toxics that present the greatest threat to public health in the largest number of urban areas. Of these 33 urban air toxics, EPA has identified the 30 with the greatest contribution from smaller commercial and industrial operations or "area" sources, as defined in the Clean Air Act. (See <http://www.epa.gov/ttn/atw/urban/list33.html> for the full list.)
  - A list of 29 area source categories that contribute to the emissions of these 30 listed air toxics. Hospital sterilizers are one of the area sources listed in the Strategy. Subsequent notices published on June 26 and November 22, 2002, added 41 source categories to this list of area sources and fulfilled the Clean Air Act requirement to identify and list area source categories at least 90 percent of the emissions of the 30 “listed” (or area source) HAPs. For more information, go to <http://www.epa.gov/ttn/atw/urban/urbanpg.html>.
- As of June 2007, EPA has regulated 28 of these 70 source categories and is working under court ordered schedules to issue the remaining area source rules listed under the Urban Air Toxics Strategy.

## **FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**

- Interested parties can download the notice from EPA's website on the Internet under recently signed rules at the following address: [www.epa.gov/ttn/oarpg/new.html](http://www.epa.gov/ttn/oarpg/new.html).
- For additional information, visit the EPA's website at: [www.epa.gov/ttn/atw/html](http://www.epa.gov/ttn/atw/html), or contact David Markwordt of the EPA's Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards at (919) 541-0837 or by e-mail at [markwordt.david@epa.gov](mailto:markwordt.david@epa.gov).