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The Honorable Michael S. Regan
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Administrator Regan,

I write with concern over the health risks associated with formaldehyde. As highlighted in a recent *ProPublica* investigation, this chemical is both damaging to human health and near ubiquitous across the country – a dangerous combination.¹ I urge the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to issue a strong, science-based final risk evaluation for formaldehyde as soon as possible, a necessary step for the agency to begin work to mitigate its harms under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA).

Formaldehyde is a chemical found in everything from household products to pesticides to motor vehicle exhaust.² It has long been known to cause adverse health impacts, including cancer. Earlier this year, the agency released the results of its 2020 Air Toxics Screening Assessment, which found that formaldehyde poses the greatest risk of cancer among all other air pollutants studied.³ EPA also released a final Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) review, which was over a decade in the making and peer reviewed by the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine. Through that rigorous process, the IRIS program established a cancer risk value for formaldehyde – it is imperative that the agency stand behind this scientifically robust data point in its final risk evaluation.⁴

Under TSCA, EPA is required to evaluate the risks of chemicals and, if a chemical is found to pose an “unreasonable risk,” the agency must eliminate that risk.⁵ While what

¹ Sharon Lerner and Al Shaw, “Formaldehyde Causes More Cancer Than Any Other Toxic Air Pollutant. Little is Being Done to Curb the Risk,” *ProPublica*, December 3, 2024.

² “Risk Evaluation for Formaldehyde,” United States Environmental Protection Agency, last modified November 18, 2024, <https://www.epa.gov/assessing-and-managing-chemicals-under-tsca/risk-evaluation-formaldehyde>

³ “2020 AirToxScreen: Assessment Results,” United States Environmental Protection Agency, last modified September 17, 2024, <https://www.epa.gov/AirToxScreen/2020-airtoxscreen-assessment-results#emissions>; Lerner and Shaw, “Formaldehyde Causes More Cancer Than Any Other Toxic Air Pollutant.”

⁴ U.S. EPA. IRIS Toxicological Review of Formaldehyde (Inhalation) (Final Report, 2024). U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Washington, DC, EPA/635/R-24/162, 2024.

⁵ 15 U.S.C §2601 *et seq.*

constitutes an “unreasonable risk” is not defined in statute, the agency has longstanding precedents to help make such a determination. The agency’s benchmark for cancer risk to residents of fence-line communities and others in the general population is 1 in 1 million – if a chemical is shown to cause cancer in more than one out of every million people, EPA has previously found that to constitute an unreasonable risk. In the case of formaldehyde, EPA’s draft evaluation found cancer risks to the general population from formaldehyde air pollution exceeding this benchmark for most uses of the chemical that are subject to direct regulation under TSCA.⁶ Unfortunately, EPA did not take the next logical step and determine that those risks are unreasonable. The agency’s own science is clear – formaldehyde is dangerous to human health. Therefore, the agency has an obligation to protect the public from the chemical by following their own science and precedent and concluding the risk is unreasonable.

Throughout your tenure, EPA has been steadfast in upholding its vital mission of protecting human health and the environment. I urge you to continue this commitment and issue a final risk evaluation for formaldehyde that is rooted in the best available science and is as strong as possible – a critical step toward future regulatory action to mitigate the known risks of the chemical.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate

⁶ Lerner and Shaw, “Formaldehyde Causes More Cancer Than Any Other Toxic Air Pollutant.”