



Key Things to Know About EPA's Final Rule for Synthetic Organic Chemical Manufacturing Plants and Polymers and Resins Plants

April 9, 2024 – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has issued a final rule that will dramatically reduce cancer risk from toxic air pollution from chemical plants that make synthetic organic chemicals and a variety of polymers and resins, including neoprene. “Air toxics” are linked to cancer and other serious health effects. The rules also include requirements to reduce emissions of smog-forming compounds.

Here are key things to know about the final rule.

1. It will keep more than 6,200 tons of air toxics out of the air each year. That includes significantly reducing emissions of two chemicals linked to cancer: ethylene oxide (EtO) and chloroprene. The rule will cut EtO emissions by nearly 54 tons per year and will cut chloroprene emissions by nearly 14 tons per year. That’s an 80 percent reduction in emissions of the two chemicals from the equipment and processes the rule covers. In addition, the rule will reduce more than 23,000 tons of smog-forming emissions each year.
2. The final rule will dramatically reduce the numbers of people with elevated risk in communities near chemical plants that emit EtO or chloroprene -- by 96 percent. EPA expects the rule to reduce harm to several groups of people who are often overburdened by air pollution. The rule will also benefit children by reducing their exposure to air toxics emissions.
3. New plants or plants that are modified must comply with the rule when it takes effect, or when they begin operation – whichever is later. The “effective date” is 60 days after the rule is published in the Federal Register.
4. Existing plants have different compliance deadlines, depending on the type of sources at the plant and what those sources emit. (For more information about these deadlines, see the overview fact sheet on EPA’s website for the rule.)
5. Some plants also will have to monitor the air at their fenceline. They must do this if sources covered by the rule make, use, store or emit EtO, chloroprene, benzene, 1,3-butadiene, ethylene dichloride or vinyl chloride. Monitoring for chloroprene at neoprene production sources must start 90 days after the rule takes effect. For the other chemicals, monitoring must begin two years after the synthetic organic chemical manufacturing rule takes effect.

The fenceline monitoring will help communities two ways. The year after monitoring begins, EPA will post quarterly results online, so everyone can see what is coming out of the plants. And if annual average concentrations of the chemicals reach certain levels, owners and operators must find the cause and make repairs. This helps ensure facilities are effectively controlling air toxics.