Memorandum of Support

July 20, 2020

S.6829-B (Kaminsky)/A.8829-A (Englebright)

Title: An act to amend the environmental conservation law, in relation to prohibiting certain uses of trichloroethylene

Purpose: To prohibit the use of trichloroethylene as a vapor degreaser, an intermediate chemical to produce other chemicals, a refrigerant, or an extraction solvent or in any other manufacturing or cleaning process or use

Statement of Support: Trichloroethylene (TCE) is a manmade, colorless liquid used mainly as a solvent to remove grease from metal parts. When a spill or leak of the chemical occurs, it readily evaporates into the atmosphere, and is easily transported into soils and groundwater. TCE breaks down slowly and is persistent in the environment, and can enter the human body via air, water, food, and soil — through ingestion, inhalation, or skin contact. TCE is classified as a “known human carcinogen,” and its adverse health effects are alarming and well documented. Long-term exposure is strongly linked to various types of cancer, including kidney, liver, lymphoma, testicular, and leukemia. Acute exposure has shown harmful effects on the nervous system, liver, respiratory system, kidneys, blood, and immune system.

Because of its widespread use as a metal degreasing agent to maintain equipment, TCE has been found in the groundwater at many military bases, airports, and aerospace manufacturing sites. TCE and other chemicals were found in the water supply at the military base in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, after wells were contaminated by leaking underground storage tanks, industrial area spills, and waste disposal sites.

Recently, an extensive investigation into Long Island aerospace corporation Northrop Grumman revealed the company knew as far back as the mid-1970s that its toxic chemicals were contaminating area groundwater. The company repeatedly made public statements contradicting the overwhelming troubling data it held. Aided by the inaction of government officials, Grumman kept hidden crucial information that could have helped stop what is now Long Island’s most notable environmental crisis. At the

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3 https://projects.newsday.com/long-island/plume-grumman-navy/
Grumman site, where TCE is the most prevalent of two dozen plume contaminants, the chemical was found to be present at a level as high as 500 parts per billion. For decades, the company failed to disclose the problem to the public, putting thousands at risk.

During the final months of the previous federal administration, the EPA proposed to ban TCE for aerosol degreasing, dry cleaning, and vapor degreasing. The agency’s risk assessment provided comprehensive evidence in support of a TCE ban. Since that time, however, the EPA has failed to finalize its proposed rule. Instead, the federal government has reversed course by commencing a new risk assessment. This legislation will prohibit the most harmful uses of TCE, consistent with the overwhelming body of scientific research. New York State must take necessary action to protect human health and the environment, especially in response to the federal government’s inaction on this issue.

The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter Strongly Urges Your Support of S.6829-B/A.8829-A.