November 13, 2020

Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Executive Chamber
Capitol Building
Albany, N.Y. 12224

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

Dear Governor Cuomo:

We urge you to sign S.6829-B/A.8829-A, to prohibit most uses of trichloroethylene (TCE), consistent with the overwhelming body of scientific research.

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 evaporates into the atmosphere and is easily transported into soils and groundwater. The chemical 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. 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.

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 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.

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.¹

During the final months of the Obama Administration, the EPA proposed banning TCE for aerosol degreasing, dry cleaning, and vapor degreasing. The agency's risk assessment provided comprehensive evidence in support of a TCE ban. Since then, however, the EPA has failed to finalize its proposed rule, and the Trump administration has reversed course by commencing a new risk assessment. In response to the federal government's inaction on this issue, New York State must take necessary action on the state level to protect human health and the environment. We urge you, Governor Cuomo, to take action to prevent future environmental crises associated with TCE, such as Grumman, in New York state.

Sincerely,

Roger Downs,
Conservation Director, Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter