



February 20, 2023

The Honorable Elizabeth Maglio
Town Councilor, District 3
Braintree, Massachusetts

Dear Councilor Maglio:

We write to you as physicians with expertise in public health and environmental medicine to express our deep concern about the short-and long-term threats to human health that likely resulted from last Thursday's fire and explosions at the Clean Harbors hazardous waste facility in Braintree. **We encourage you to request an immediate and full health hazard evaluation of the Clean Harbors site and surrounding neighborhoods by the Massachusetts Departments of Public Health and Environmental Protection to ascertain the cause and the possible consequences for human health of this event.**

As medical and public health professionals we are not reassured by the unfounded claim that environmental quality at the Clean Harbors site is now within "normal parameters." Diagnoses such as this need to be based on testing and not on personal opinion.

Clean Harbors is the largest waste disposal facility in New England, and it stores and handles a wide range of hazardous materials in liquid, solid, semi-solid, sludge and gas forms. Thursday's fire at the site generated dense clouds of black, oily smoke that almost certainly contained multiple toxic contaminants such as xylene, benzene, toluene. It resulted additionally in a major spike in airborne particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) pollution - detected at nearby air quality sensors - to high levels associated with

increased risk of myocardial infarction and cardiac arrhythmias in adults and to asthma and other respiratory diseases in children. Pregnant women, infants, the elderly and individuals with underlying medical conditions are highly vulnerable to this form of pollution.

Firefighters and police officers from multiple municipalities were almost certainly exposed to high levels of toxic and carcinogenic pollutants at the site during and after the fire. Residents reported experiencing respiratory symptoms during and for many hours following this event. Soot-like material was observed to be deposited on surrounding homes and cars in the Fore River Basin.

We encourage you to work expeditiously with the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection and the Bureau of Environmental Health of the Massachusetts Department of Health to perform an immediate and comprehensive investigation of this explosion and fire. This investigation should include the collection of samples of soot and surface soil, and an interrogation of all air quality monitors within the Fore River Basin. Sensitive individuals or those with high levels of exposure – such as firefighters and other emergency personnel -- should have baseline health testing and follow-up. An evaluation of evacuation plans for the area should be reviewed.

In the airline industry, a near miss triggers a root-cause analysis to investigate the causes of the incident and prevent future disasters. The citizens of Braintree, Quincy and Weymouth deserve no less. A thorough investigation is especially needed in the Fore River basin given the high concentration in this heavily populated community of multiple facilities with high potential for fire and explosion – Clean Harbors, Twin Rivers and the Enbridge natural gas pipeline and compressor station. An uncontrolled fire and explosion in this area would be a disaster of major proportions.

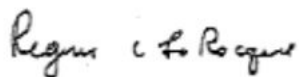
Your constituents deserve to fully know the nature of the exposures that they experienced during and following the Clean Harbors fire. They need to be reassured that hazardous wastes at Clean Harbors are being properly handled and stored. They need to be involved in the development of an evacuation plan to protect their health and safety in the event of a future disaster.

The causes and consequences of the Clean Harbors fire need to be thoroughly investigated. They cannot be wished away.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Philip J. Landrigan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Philip J. Landrigan, MD, MSc
Professor of Biology and Director, Program for Global Public Health & the Common
Good
Boston College

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Regina LaRocque". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Regina LaRocque, MD, MPH
Associate Professor of Medicine
Harvard Medical School

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brita E. Lundberg". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Brita E. Lundberg, MD
Chair of the Board
Greater Boston Physicians for Social Responsibility