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United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510–6175

May 13, 2019

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro,

In August 2017, Hurricane Harvey made landfall, unleashing unprecedented rainfall over southeastern Texas and southwestern Louisiana. Among the structures damaged by Hurricane Harvey were warehouses and trailers housing critical organic peroxide refrigeration systems in the Arkema plant in Crosby, Texas. As a result, three separate fires combusted over 350,000 pounds of organic peroxide, resulting in a week-long evacuation of nearby residents. In 2017, the National Climate Assessment reported that the temperature and precipitation extremes that are associated with climate change may make certain natural disasters more frequent or more intense.[1]

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has primary responsibility for overseeing compliance with the Clean Air Act, including requirements under which certain chemical facilities must develop risk management plans (RMP) to detect and prevent or minimize accidental releases of dangerous chemicals from their facilities. Under EPA's regulations, such plans must include worst-case release scenarios for regulated toxic and flammable substances, as well as more likely scenarios that could impact the public. Among other requirements governing the RMPs, EPA directs facilities to identify the major hazards that could impact the facilities and identify safeguards to control the hazards.

Given the potential for uncontrolled releases from chemical facilities as a result of climate change, including from an increase in the intensity and frequency of certain extreme weather events, we are requesting GAO's assistance in addressing the following questions:

1) What is known about the number and types of regulated facilities that are located in areas that may be vulnerable to the effects of climate change?

[1]U.S. Global Change Research Program, Climate Science Special Report, Fourth National Climate Assessment, Volume I (Washington, D.C.: 2017). The U.S. Global Change Research Program is made up of 13 federal departments and agencies that carry out research and support the nation's response to global change.

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2) To what extent, if at all, do regulated facilities plan for, update and safeguard against potential external hazards that may be exacerbated by climate change in their RMPs?

3) What challenges, if any, do regulated facilities face in planning for and safeguarding against potential external hazards that may be exacerbated by climate change?

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. If you have any questions, please contact Michal Freedhoff, a senior member of the minority staff of the Environment and Public Works Committee, at Michal_Freedhoff@epw.senate.gov, or Lauren Tavar of Senator Booker's office at Lauren_Tavar@booker.senate.gov.

With best personal regards, we are,

Sincerely yours,

Tom Carper
Ranking Member
Committee on Environment and
Public Works

Cory A. Booker
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Superfund,
Waste Management, and
Regulatory Oversight