Verbal Comments on Permit Number 10 313 R03 by Joel Porter, Policy Manager of CleanAIRE NC

Good evening, I’m Joel Porter, the Policy Manager of CleanAIRE NC. I’m here to comment on EcoLab’s request to modify their existing air permit in New Hanover, numbered 10313R03, in order to comply with the Ambient Air Level (AAL) for Methyl Bromide and Phosphine.

As our executive Director mentioned on yesterday’s call for the Flower’s Timber permit, the Division of Air Quality should be commended for their hard work creating the AAL for methyl bromide, it is a good first step in regulating this highly toxic, highly hazardous chemical.

Inhaling Methyl Bromide at even low levels can cause severe health conditions, including headaches, weakness, sore throat, nausea, and neurological effects. High exposure can damage the eyes, skin, lungs, kidneys, and central nervous system. This is dangerous to any community near a fumigation site employing this toxic chemical, but it is especially dangerous, and ethically haphazard when used in proximity to an elementary school.

Earlier today I brought home a beautiful new daughter from the hospital -- my first. While there are times when a ‘Not in my backyard’ mentality is not realistic, or appropriate, this is not one of those times. While I’m not near the fumigation site, the hindsight of today’s wonderful experience cements my belief that fumigation with these chemicals should not be used in anyone’s backyard. We therefore oppose this modification request, and ultimately, the use of these chemicals should be ceased.

DAQ should give serious consideration to implementing a rigorous monitoring and reporting campaign to safeguard community health. The facility emits methyl bromide from stacks just 40 feet in height, far too short for the toxin to safely diffuse before reaching the surrounding residential areas.
The permit’s conditions anticipate that they will nearly hit 100% of the AALs for both phosphine and Methyl Bromide, yet the monitors used by the company do not come close to being sensitive enough to pick up dangerous levels of the chemicals. (As Dr. Parr has already noted...) When the AALs were being developed, the Science Advisory Board suggested using a monitor that can detect emissions at parts per billion; the permit modification suggests the company will use a handheld monitoring device that is sensitive to 0.5 parts per million - far less powerful than what the SAB recommended.

If this chemical is to be used at all, a robust network of monitors running continuously across the dispersion zone can provide an early warning of where and when methyl bromide concentrations reach dangerous levels.

We also recommend that fenceline communities are notified of their access to regular monitoring reports, and that those reports are sent to the county health department.

We thank the Division for hosting this hearing but urge you to do everything in your power to protect public health when issuing air permits for facilities using methyl bromide.