

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Ticking Time Bomb: Residents, Senator, Voice Concerns Over Fuel Tanks Being Stored At Gallows Bay Port

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ST. CROIX -- Residents gathered at the Virgin Islands Port Authority's (VIPA) passenger terminal in Christiansted on Thursday evening for a town hall meeting where VIPA was hoping to talk about and explain in length its plans for the revitalization of its Gallows Bay port. But the plans were quickly torpedoed when residents and business owners, who live in the Gallows Bay area, started voicing concerns over the large ISO tanks currently being stored at the small port.

Residents, along with Sen. Kenneth "Kenny" Gittens, have called the situation a "ticking time bomb" that could reek havoc in the small community if something goes wrong.

In the small passenger terminal where the multitudes were gathered, people grew impatient with Damian Cartwright, senior engineer for VIPA, for what one man said were indirect answers about the safety of Gallows Bay during the construction phase of the yet-to-be-determined design concept.

"I don't believe you," a man yelled out from the audience, motioning to Cartwright, "give me specifics and then I'll trust you."

Emotions flared not necessarily against the revitalization of the port -- the first phase of which was [approved](#) by the 31st Legislature last month, but rather the safety of Gallows Bay.

"What happened is that the sensitive issue of ISO tanks and safety concerns was brought to the forefront of VIPA, and the general public being very aware and in need of the situation to be corrected, and rightfully so," Cartwright told *The Consortium*. The senior engineer added that he wasn't surprised that the meeting was overtaken with concerns about the tanks. However, "the town hall meeting was not to address this particular issue, but rather the development of the Gallows Bay port as a whole, and to present different concepts." Nonetheless, VIPA was placed in the position of dealing with the new matter at hand.

The ISO tanks currently being stored at the Gallows Bay port hold jet fuel, propane and gasoline. Cartwright said the upsurge of delivery to the Christiansted facility came about after the closure of HOVENSA, which saw gas station owners and other companies in the business of fuel using the port as their new route. Some of the companies that ship the tanks here include Norma H and Water Spirit. Bunkers of St. Croix, one of the more recognizable names in the business of fuel-hauling, receives its shipments from the Gordon A. Finch Molasses Pier on the south shore of the island on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, according to VIPA officials.

Cartwright said Gallows Bay residents are generally not against the redevelopment of the area because what VIPA plans on doing will enhance Christiansted and minimize the current agreement that allows the ISO tanks to be stored at the port.

Gittens, aligned with residents concerned about safety, said he's been calling for a stoppage of the oil tanks being stored in Gallows Bay.

"They need to make alternate arrangements for those fuel tanks to be stored," Gittens told *The Consortium* following Thursday's town hall. "The alternate site should be over on the south shore and when they come in, have them specifically dispatched to the areas where they're going rather than storing them on the pier."

Gittens said he's asked government agencies with some level of authority in relation to safety and security of fuel tanks to take action. He said he's been working with DPNR and the Port Authority to find a solution to what he calls a dangerous situation. The second-term senator also highlighted the dangers of the ISO tanks to the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency Director Mona Barnes during a Committee on Finance hearing on Thursday.

"I'm asking that this situation be addressed immediately, now rather than later," Gittens went on. "Because in the event there's an accident, this is just a catastrophe waiting to happen; and I don't think our first responders are prepared."

Gittens is advocating for the tanks to be stored at the container port on the south shore. He then highlighted the benefits thereof as the tanks would be closer to delivery and would not need be stored all day in a location that's constantly busy with pedestrians.

"I want to remind the public that just a few months ago, because of a gas leak in the downtown Christiansted area, the town was shutdown for about three days. So anything of this sort, with propane and jet fuel, and with the number of residents and businesses we have within the immediate area of the Gallows Bay facility, even our healthcare facility won't be able to handle such mass casualties," Gittens concluded.

Feature Image: Tanks lined on the Gallows Bay port in Christiansted.