

The Virgin Islands Consortium

DPNR In Discussions With EPA And H.H. Tire & Battery Owners On Cleanup Efforts Following Fire

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ST. CROIX -- The Department of Planning and Natural Resources said via press release on Friday that it has been in discussions with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the owners of H.H. Tire & Battery in regards to cleanup efforts following the [fire that burned down the company's Castle Coakley facility](#).

"Until such time as the investigation and environmental assessment is complete, D.P.N.R. recommends that residents who continue to experience difficulties with respect to respiratory and/or other health related issues to seek medical attention," D.P.N.R. said.

Residents who reside near the H.H. Tire & Battery facility reported breathing issues, as well as unusable cistern water, since the smoke and particles that it carried from the burned tires, batteries, oils and other combustible products blackened their roofs.

The department urged residents residing in neighboring communities to vent enclosed spaces and fabrics that tend to trap odors, and particulate matter that are oftentimes found in the aftermath of fires.

The company [announced on Friday](#) its temporary location of business, a quick turnaround of events that bodes well for St. Croix, as the firm has told The Consortium that it had retained all 30 of its employees.

The temporary site is located across from Junie's Restaurant, at the east end of Hess Road where it meets South Shore Road, according to a post on the company's Facebook page. An opening date will be announced next week "once we confirm a few shipments we are waiting on," said H.H. Tire and Battery media relations representative Rebecca Boulanger.

"Our amazing team has been working hard to get it ready as soon as possible for all of our loyal patrons," wrote the company on its Facebook page. "We appreciate all of the support we have received this week from those near and far."

An all-consuming fire

H.H. Tire and Battery was completely ruined by fire [early Monday](#).

The building's roof had caved in; vehicles belonging to residents that stayed at the facility overnight for repairs were left with only their body frames; smoke from burned tires, batteries and other items letting off toxic plumes engulfed the skies and spread west, causing the closure of at least six schools, according to the Department of Education. The Superior Court also shuttered half-day Monday, and classes at the St. Croix Career and Technical Education Center — with the inclusion of the Adult Secondary Education Program — were canceled.

Fire Service Director Clifford Joseph expressed remorse late Monday for both the owners of H.H. Tire & Battery, as well as the employees who were out of work.

"I really feel sorry for not only the owner but the employees, because the employees hit a wall," he said. "Fire destroys and it takes away from you."

Some Department of Public Works personnel were also on the scene to help Fire Service personnel bulldoze the walls on either side of the building to get in, as the facility's industrial doors were shut. The building was destroyed from front to back, as the flames ruined every section of the venerable business; H.H. Tire & Battery was a stalwart in the community that employed many, and had been in existence for 52 years, according to a blurb on the company's website.

While the fire was still raging on Monday, loud explosions — possibly from batteries and other combustible products — rocked the Castle Coakley neighborhood. The fire was so fierce that the heat could be felt all the way to the Bates Trucking entrance. Multiple fire trucks worked around the clock to contain the blaze, and in a stroke of luck, they were

aided by rain, which came heavily at dawn, dousing the fire with an incessant pouring.

Started by Howard Hensley in 1964, H.H. Tire & Battery had become a go-to location for vehicle maintenance. The company was “built on the foundation of providing quality products and outstanding customer service for a reasonable price,” reads the website. The firm had since grown to become the largest shop of its kind on the island.

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