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Dept. of Health Urging Community to Report Potential Health Problems Resulting From Limetree Bay Gas Release

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ST. CROIX — The Department of Planning and Natural Resources said Saturday it has confirmed that there were elevated concentrations of H₂S (Hydrogen Sulfide) in the No. 8 flare header at the Limetree Bay Facility. According to a V.I. Dept. of Health release, D.P.N.R. is in close communication with the facility and an investigation is ongoing to determine necessary corrective measures.

This foul, gaseous smell, which can smell similar to rotten eggs, has permeated throughout the Frederiksted area for the past few days, the health department said. The gas is extremely flammable and highly toxic.

"Any potential threat to the health of the public is always a concern of mine," said Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion. "As DPNR continues to monitor environmental effects, I encourage you to report symptoms like headaches, nausea, and especially those of a respiratory nature to your healthcare provider."

According to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, hydrogen sulfide can have mild to severe health impacts. Studies in humans suggest that the respiratory tract and nervous system are the most sensitive targets of hydrogen sulfide toxicity.

D.O.H. said exposure to low concentrations of hydrogen sulfide may irritate the eyes, nose, or throat. It may also cause difficulty in breathing for some asthmatics. Respiratory distress or arrest has been observed in people exposed to extremely high concentrations of hydrogen sulfide.

Exposure to low concentrations of hydrogen sulfide may also cause headaches, poor memory, tiredness, and balance problems. Brief exposures to high concentrations of hydrogen sulfide can cause loss of consciousness. In most cases, the person regains consciousness without any other effects. However, some individuals may have permanent or long-term effects, such as headaches, poor attention span, poor memory, and poor motor function.

Individuals with respiratory ailments such as allergies, lung disease, or asthma should consider taking protective actions such as staying indoors or temporarily relocating to areas less affected.

DPNR and the Department of Health will monitor this situation and advise the community accordingly, the release stated.

If you have any questions or concerns, call DPNR at (340) 773-1082 ext. 2221 or Environmental Health division at (340) 718-1311 ext. 3709.