

The Virgin Islands Consortium

EPA Sending Experts to Territory to Investigate Limetree Bay Gas Release That Fouled Parts of St. Croix in Recent Days

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Aerial view of Limetree Bay Terminals By. LIMETREE BAY

Federal authorities are investigating the recent gas release emanating from the Limetree Bay facility, which fouled the air downwind from the refinery located on the south shore of St. Croix. Some residents have complained that the odor has made them ill.

Officials of the Environmental Protection Agency are investigating the incident, which occurred last week. A foul odor from the refinery [reported by residents on Monday](#) was from maintenance conducted during the day, Limetree said. "After investigation, Limetree

Bay determined that maintenance activity being conducted at the facility earlier today may have caused a brief and unpleasant odor. That maintenance work has been completed. We sincerely apologize for any impact this may have caused the community. Thank you," said the company.

In a statement to the Washington Post Tuesday, EPA Spokesman John Senn [said](#), "It is EPA's objective to ensure that the facility operates in compliance with all applicable legal requirements without jeopardizing public health and the environment by its operations. The incidents have been distressing and, in some cases, caused members of this already overburdened community to become ill."

The agency said it would send experts and staff to Limetree Bay as early as this week to conduct a joint investigation of the facility.

The original stench, which Limetree Bay said was caused by "an operating upset in the sulfur processing part of the refinery," has been flagged by the V.I. Dept. of Health and the V.I. Dept. of Planning and Natural Resources, both of which have issued correspondences on the matter.

D.O.H. on Saturday [issued a release](#) urging Virgin Islanders with respiratory issues to take caution. The department 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.

"Any potential threat to the health of the public is always a concern of mine," said Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion on Saturday. "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."

D.O.H. said D.P.N.R. had confirmed that there were elevated concentrations of H₂S (Hydrogen Sulfide) in the No. 8 flare header at the Limetree Bay Facility. 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.

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.

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.