

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Croix Residents Continue to Complain About Foul Odor From Limetree Bay

Health / **Published On May 07, 2021 04:40 AM /**

Staff Consortium **May 07, 2021**



Moving image of Limetree Bay (night shot) By. VI CONSORTIUM

ST. CROIX — A 7-year-old, who lives with her mother near the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport, complained to her mother about an unpleasant smell in the house. "It's been like that from yesterday," the mother told the Consortium Thursday, referring to the gaseous smell that Limetree Bay has since confirmed was emanating from the refinery. "Last night it died down a little bit but today you can smell it in my house. My daughter has all kinds of underlying issues. I don't need something else to make her even more sick."

Another resident, who has been sending messages to the Consortium relative to the odor, said late Thursday, "The toxic gas stench from the refinery is unbearable."

The V.I. Dept. of Education, which dismissed three in-person St. Croix schools early Thursday, extended the learning of those students to virtual into Friday. "Out of an abundance of caution and to avoid instructional interruptions during the school day, Eulalie R. Rivera K-8, Arthur A. Richards K-8, and the St. Croix Career and Technical Education Center will remain closed to in-person learning on May 7; students will attend classes virtually," the department said via release.

Limetree Bay on Thursday afternoon issued a statement on the matter, stating that the odor was a result of maintenance work being performed on the Coker unit at the refinery. "Limetree Bay has become aware of an odor affecting areas west of the facility. We are conducting maintenance activity at the Coker unit, which has resulted in light hydrocarbon odors. We will continue to monitor the situation, but there is the potential for additional odors while maintenance continues. We apologize for any impact this may have caused the community," the company said.

On Wednesday, the company said it had voluntarily agreed to reinstate the refinery's legacy ambient air monitoring program. The announcement follows an Environmental Protection Agency Clean Air Act [violation notice](#) against Limetree Monday. The agency said company failed to operate five sulfur dioxide (SO₂) monitors in the surrounding communities of Christiansted on St. Croix and the associated weather tower on the facility grounds.

"EPA issued this notice of violation to protect the people who live near and work at this refinery, and we have also deployed a team of experts to St. Croix and are working to assess Limetree Bay's compliance with environmental laws," EPA acting Regional Administrator Walter Mugdan [said](#) Monday. "Many residents are justifiably concerned about recent incidents at this refinery and have questioned if it is operating in accordance with requirements. In fact, the measurement of sulfur dioxide in the atmosphere is key as it helps us assess air quality, and the data are used to oversee regulated facilities to ensure that appropriate control measures are in place to reduce people's exposure to the gas."

Limetree Bay CEO Jeff Rinker said the company would reinstate the monitors. "Limetree Bay has voluntarily agreed to reactivate the five area monitors that were put in place prior to our ownership of the refinery to detect sulfur dioxide in ambient air," he said. "Over the last several weeks, our leadership team has met with community leaders, and government officials, including the EPA. While Limetree Bay is not required to perform this air monitoring under our existing permits, we are committed to being a responsible part of the St. Croix community and believe this investment will help build trust in our operations."

The EPA said its notice to Limetree Bay found that the company has failed to operate five ambient SO₂ monitoring stations, two to the west of the refinery and three to the north of the refinery, as required by EPA's Prevention of Significant Deterioration and other regulations. The company also failed to operate a meteorological tower, the EPA said.

A major source of air pollution, such as Limetree Bay, is subject to controls under its air permits, the EPA further stated. Limetree Bay may be liable for civil penalties and required to take actions to correct the violations specified in the Notice of Violation (NOV) issued to it on April 30, 2021. Limetree Bay has been informed that it has the opportunity to request a video conference to discuss the NOV, and that 30 days following the issuance of the NOV, EPA is authorized to take further actions in response to the violations.

Limetree Bay said it would initiate reinstatement immediately. The company also said it would provide additional information on the timeline to repair and restore the air monitors, once a full assessment of their condition is complete.