

The Virgin Islands Consortium

V.I. National Guard Civil Support Team Detects Elevated Levels of Sulfur Dioxide in Air Near Limetree Bay

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Limetree Bay Terminals in 2018. By. BONNIE JO MOUNT/WASHINGTON POST/GETTY IMAGES

Government House said late Saturday that preliminary air quality testing conducted by the Virgin Islands National Guard Civil Support Team Saturday found elevated levels of sulfur dioxide (SO₂) in the air near the Limetree Bay Refinery.

High concentrations of SO₂ can cause inflammation and irritation of the respiratory system, especially during heavy physical activity. The resulting symptoms can include

pain when taking a deep breath, coughing, throat irritation, and breathing difficulties.

Saturday's findings were the result of new monitoring instrumentation in place and the mobilization of VING's Civil Support Team, Gov't House made known.

VING's Civil Support Team joined the investigation into the source of the noxious odor after being activated by Governor Albert Bryan and identified the chemical constituents after conducting air quality monitoring Friday afternoon into Saturday morning.

The team's preliminary reading found elevated quantities of sulfur dioxide in the air near the refinery, which has narrowed the investigation to the small industrial corridor on the island's south shore that includes the refinery, the Diageo Rum Distillery, Anguilla Landfill, and the Asphalt Plant north of the landfill.

However, readings conducted outside the other facilities Saturday did not provide any elevated readings of harmful chemical constituents, according to the release.

While the refinery did not identify a particular upset, based on the chemical constituents present in the atmosphere, the team's investigation continues to center on the refinery but has not ruled out other sources, the administration said.

The release stated that the Government of the Virgin Islands received additional air quality monitoring instruments from the Environmental Protection Agency in support of the ongoing investigation. The monitoring instruments arrived in St. Croix Saturday and will be utilized by the Department of Planning and Natural Resources and the EPA and will be deployed throughout the island to conduct continuous air quality monitoring in support of confirming the exact source of the odor.

Once the source is confirmed and identified, the government's Unified Command team will take definitive action to eliminate the source and seek appropriate remedies and penalties with the appropriate parties, said Gov't House.

In the team's continued effort to confirm or rule out other chemical constituents causing the odor, VING's Civil Support Team will be stationed in Frederiksted town Saturday evening in the effort to quickly mobilize and conduct air quality testing in response to resident complaints.

Residents with respiratory ailments such as allergies, lung disease, or asthma are strongly encouraged to consider staying indoors or taking other protective actions.

If you have questions or need to report the smell of a noxious or gaseous odor, call DPNR at (340) 773-1082 ext. 2221 or the Environmental Health Division at (340) 718-1311 ext. 3709.

The government's Unified Command team will continue its response through the evening Saturday and provide an update on Sunday.