

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Under Pressure, EPA Says it Will Continue to Monitor Air Quality at Limetree Bay

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A portion of the Limetree Bay oil refinery. By. LIMETREE BAY

Under pressure from local and U.S. mainland organizations, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced that it would continue to monitor the air quality at Limetree Bay, after deciding last week [to end the effort](#) since Limetree Bay announced [an indefinite shutdown](#) of oil refining at the south shore facility.

In its latest update, the EPA said it decided to continue operating sulfur dioxide and hydrogen sulfide monitors "as the agency further assesses the situation and extended shutdown plans for the Limetree Bay Refinery."

EPA said it is "committed to ensuring that Limetree Bay's activities and operations are in compliance with the law without jeopardizing people's health and the environment," and that throughout its ongoing enforcement actions, it has been focused, "first and foremost, on the health and safety of the St. Croix community."

EPA's monitors are set up to measure sulfur dioxide (SO₂) and hydrogen sulfide (H₂S) emissions from the facility, the agency said. These monitors have been operating since May 14, 2021 to measure SO₂ and H₂S after a series of incidents at the refinery that endangered the health and welfare of nearby communities, according to [the latest update](#).

Following its announcement last week to end monitoring at Limetree Bay, a number of organizations wrote a joint letter to EPA Administrator Michael Regan calling on the agency to rethink its decision. The letter, signed by Sommer Sibilly-Brown, executive director of VT Good Food Coalition, Jennifer Valiulis, executive director of St. Croix Environmental Association, and David Bond, associate director of the Center for the Advancement of Public Action at Bennington College, stated, "Given the troubled history of this plant, including unchecked emissions without any air monitoring equipment and broken oily waste pipelines that leak directly into the island's only freshwater aquifer, we write with the urgent request that EPA be fully present on site during the entire shutdown operation."

The letter also stated, "The past six months have been an environmental nightmare for many residents of St. Croix, and it took EPA far too long to respond to the clear and present danger of this refinery. Going forward, we respectfully insist that EPA operate independent monitoring equipment and oversee all shutdown operations at the Limetree Refinery."

"Our health is too important and the previous negligence of this facility too great to allow purging of gases and releasing residual oil without substantial independent oversight during the entire shutdown. Our community has suffered too much to allow any continued contamination of the island during the shutdown."

Hundreds of jobs have been lost as a result of the refinery shutdown, and Limetree Bay will let go 271 of its direct employees effective Sept. 19. Pinnacle Services LLC, which has employed hundreds at Limetree Bay, on Wednesday laid off 100 employees from a variety of work disciplines tied to the refinery.

Among the 100 people made redundant were administrative assistants, engineers, consultants, foremen, and laborers. In essence, if your employment at Pinnacle was tied to the refinery and you had no terminal-related roles, you were laid off or on the list to be let go.

Limetree said since the temporary suspension of its petroleum refining and processing operations on May 12, it had been working to obtain capital to assist in its restart efforts.

"This was an extremely difficult decision for us, and we are truly saddened to announce suspension of our restart plans for the refinery," said Mr. Rinker. "Our personnel have demonstrated tremendous commitment and dedication in restarting the refinery, and we continue to be proud of their hard work. Unfortunately, this is our only option, given the

extreme financial constraints facing the company.”

Limetree Bay’s oil storage terminal will not be affected by the decision to suspend the restart of the refinery and will continue in operation. That operation, however, employs less than 100 people.