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19 A.T. Construction Employees Working at Container Port Fall Ill After Inhaling Foul-Smelling Gas; Investigation Into Origin Launched

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Container Port on St. Croix. By. ERNICE GILBERT/VI CONSORTIUM

ST. CROIX — V.I. Port Authority Executive Director Carlton Dowe on Wednesday told the authority's governing board that 19 employees of contractor A.T. Construction fell ill while performing work on a project in the area of the Molasses Pier and Container Port on St. Croix as a result of foul emissions whose source is unknown.

A.T. Construction has been contracted by VIPA for a project at the Container Port.

“We’ve been experiencing a challenge down at the Molasses Pier Container Port area with some emissions; we don’t know what it is,” he said. Mr. Dowe said one likely source could be Limetree Bay, but he quickly added, “I don’t know that for a fact.”

He expressed serious concern for the safety of the employees at the site. “Twelve of them have gotten sick and went to the hospital in one day. Most recently another seven have gotten sick. We must be concerned about the health, legal responsibilities and liability,” he said.

The executive director said VIPA has contacted the Department of Planning and Natural Resources and Limetree Bay requesting that additional monitors be added near the site. He said an environmental team from Limetree along with VIPA employees visited the site Saturday. The Environmental Protection Agency has also been made aware of the incidents.

On Wednesday, an agreement was reached for additional monitors to be installed in the southeast region of the Container Port and the Molasses Pier, “where we believe these emissions might be coming from,” Mr. Dowe said.

Mr. Dowe pointed to a possible propane leak as one potential cause of the odor. He spoke of an additive that is usually included in residential propane that carries an odor. “The actual propane in the plant [Limetree Bay] you should not be able to smell it,” he said.

Mr. Dowe said the incident has slowed a project currently ongoing at the Container Port. “It is a significant issue because the last week and a half we are looking at our project down there and it literally had to come to halt,” the executive director said.

Correction: Sept. 22, 2021

A previous version of this story stated that the employees who fell ill were Port Authority employees. However, those individuals are employed with A.T. Construction, which is contracted by VIPA for a project at the Container Port. The story has been updated to reflect the correct information.