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Port Hamilton Says 25 Employees Assigned to Monitor Coke Dome as Smoldering at Refinery Continues; DPNR, EPA Aware of Situation

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The Port Hamilton Refining and Transportation Refinery on St. Croix. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

Port Hamilton Refinery and Transportation, the new owners of the beleaguered refinery on the south shore of St. Croix said Friday that the smoldering, or a slow burn process without flames that was reported last week has not been extinguished, and that 25 personnel are assigned to the Coke Dome at the site, including specialized emergency response personnel.

The smoldering started on August 4 and was made public on Aug. 6. PHRT said employees immediately responded and set up fire hose water spray nozzles inside the coke dome to cool the

material. Water has been applied 24 hours daily and the temperature readings inside the coke dome are being monitored to ensure entry by personnel is safe, the company said.

Both the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the V.I. Dept. of Planning and Natural Resources have been made aware of the situation and are looking into it.

"Heavy equipment is being utilized to move the petroleum coke material inside the dome so the water can reach below the surface of the pile to safely suppress the smoldering petroleum coke," PHRT explained. "To keep all employees safe, the process must be done at a slow, controlled pace. Petroleum coke is a solid that resembles charcoal."

PHRT further explained that when stored in a dry, warm area for a period, smoldering can occur, releasing heat without fire. "Port Hamilton continues to monitor the air near the coke dome and at the fence line of the facility and has not detected any air quality health impacts," the company said.