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Lawmakers Give Refinery Owners Until Monday to Furnish Information on Reopening Plans

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An aerial shot of the Limetree Bay facility on the south shore of St. Croix. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM

Senator Kenneth Gittens, the chair of the Committee on Economic Development and Agriculture has written to the principals of Port Hamilton Refining & Transportation, giving them until next Monday (September 5th) to respond to a request by legislators to provide information that supports the company's ability to finance and safely reopen the oil refinery on the south shore of St. Croix.

On August 26th, the committee issued a formal letter to Port Hamilton reemphasizing a request to furnish it with information that proves its readiness to restart the refinery.

“We have also still not received the basic information from the company including the information on its air quality monitoring, ownership and principal partners, job availabilities and the status of the [petroleum coke smoldering] at the site,” he explained while giving his contribution at the convening of the full Senate on Tuesday.

Port Hamilton recently purchased the decades-old facility on St. Croix and has since announced a tentative starting timeline in the second quarter of 2023. However, before the facility can reopen, the company must convince lawmakers that it has the finances, equipment and investor support to do so safely, given the series of incidents that ultimately led to the past owners filing for bankruptcy in 2021.

The company needs badly to show legislators that it can adopt and maintain strict health and safety measures for the people it plans to employ and those residents situated in the surroundings of the facility, and those downwind thereof.

During a July 14th hearing, Charles Chambers, the principal owner of Port Hamilton Refining & Transportation and his team were told to submit the status of several permits needed to reopen next year including a Prevention of Significant Deterioration (PSD) permit from the Environmental Protection Agency, a Root Cause Analysis (RCA), and a new water pollution permit.

The executives also gave commitments to work with the Department of Planning Natural Resources to coordinate efforts that will allow the department to receive instant data about the level of emissions in the atmosphere.

Legislators want full transparency, particularly as the most recent restart effort, which was first initiated by ArcLight Capital Partners LLC, Investors failed even after injecting approximately \$1.4 billion to revive the facility. The initial restart of the site was abandoned after thousands of residents were affected by toxic emissions that spewed oil on their homes and contaminated drinking water.