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EPA Orders St. Croix Refinery Owner to Remove Dangerous Chemicals Left in Pipes Causing Advanced Corrosion and Disrepair

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The St. Croix oil refinery located on the island's south shore, now owned by Port Hamilton Refining and Transportation. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said on Monday that it is requiring Port Hamilton Refining and Transportation (PHRT), the owner of the refinery on the south shore of St. Croix, to hire experts to safely remove chemicals that are not being properly managed at the facility in equipment that EPA had identified as being of concern after an EPA inspection.

The EPA said the Order on Consent requires full access for EPA to be on-site to oversee the work and safety measures in the short term until the chemicals are removed or secured.

“Ensuring the communities near this refinery are protected is front and center in all our work. This consent order will ensure the removal of the ammonia, liquified petroleum gas and other chemicals,” said Lisa F. Garcia, EPA regional administrator. “We are holding this facility to the same standards that we hold any refinery or industrial facility — meaning they must not pose a serious risk to workers or community members, and they must follow our environmental laws. EPA’s mission is to protect human health and the environment, and our commitment to advance EJ in this community is unwavering.”

Under a consent order using Clean Air Act authorities, PHRT will remove all ammonia, liquified petroleum gas (or LPG), amines and hydrogen sulfide from the equipment at the facility, the EPA said. These chemicals have been used for refinery processes.

In addition, the agreement requires PHRT to take certain interim measures, beginning immediately, during the period before the materials are addressed, including increased monitoring and inspections of the systems containing the amine, ammonia and LPG, and actions to improve emergency preparedness. Over 40,000 pounds of anhydrous ammonia are reported to be at the refinery, according to the EPA. Piping and many valves on the LPG unit are in an advanced state of corrosion and disrepair. The equipment contains over 37,000 pounds of LPG.

The Order on Consent requires the work to be performed by a qualified contractor to assess the systems containing anhydrous ammonia, LPG, amine, and hydrogen sulfide and determine how to safely remove those chemicals. Once a contractor is approved by EPA, that contractor has thirty days to perform an assessment of the three systems and propose options for the safe removal of the chemicals. The contractors will provide its options report to EPA within seven days of completing these actions. EPA will review the report and provide any comments. Work on the removal must start within five days of EPA’s approval. The order also requires reports to be submitted to EPA during and upon the completion of work. The order provides for EPA’s oversight of all work and contains enforcement provisions.

In September, EPA inspected the refinery to determine the general state of chemical safety at the facility. During the inspection, EPA inspectors identified safety concerns, including corrosion of piping and valves, that could result in a chemical release or fire, particularly in areas where large quantities of ammonia, LPG, and amine and hydrogen sulfide are located.

EPA alerted the company to the deficiencies and issued a detailed inspection report, which was also [shared with the public](#). Today’s action addresses the most serious of those issues first and EPA will continue its work to address other environmental issues at the refinery going forward, the federal agency said.

EPA also set up a toll-free community hotline (866) 462-4789, developed a dedicated website, and is engaging regularly with the community.