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Refinery Owners Say Agreement Has Been Reached With EPA for Removal of Dangerous Chemicals Left Rusting in Pipes; Plaskett Reiterates Need for New Industry on South Shore

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**The Port Hamilton Refining and Transportation refinery on the south shore of St. Croix.
By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM**

The owner of the refinery located on the south shore of St. Croix, Port Hamilton Refining and Transportation, said in a statement that it has reached an agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency to address safety concerns raised by EPA.

PHRT said it is looking forward to working closely with the EPA "and has already made strides to fully deliver on the EPA's requests."

The EPA [on Monday announced](#) that it is requiring PHRT to hire experts to safely remove chemicals that are not being properly managed at the facility in equipment that the EPA had identified as being of concern after an 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.

Later Monday, Port Hamilton said it quickly acted to remedy safety concerns identified by the EPA.

"We at Port Hamilton agree that the safety and health of our refinery workers, the St. Croix community, and the local environment are of the utmost importance and will remain at the forefront of our operations," PHRT principal owner Charles Chambers said.

He added, "In fact, we quickly initiated action once the EPA informed us of their concerns about chemical substances. We had already retained certified third-party experts to complete an inspection as part of our corporate due diligence to restart the refinery and immediately engaged them to help us address the mechanical integrity concerns of EPA. We have since implemented measures to enhance the safety of our operations as we complete the work requested by the EPA."

In its release Monday, the EPA said that 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. These chemicals have been used for refinery processes.

Governor Albert Bryan in a statement Monday welcomed what he said was "the open communication we have initiated between the EPA and Port Hamilton," which Mr. Bryan said is creating "a pathway to safely restoring this key economic driver in our community."

"While this announcement only relates to clean-up on the site, we have made great strides in our resolve to achieve the necessary balance between protecting the health of St. Croix residents working in and living near the refinery and the territory's economic development through finding a path to the progressive reopening of the refinery," the governor said. "And we remain focused on working with the EPA and Port Hamilton to achieve that balance safely."

Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett said she met with the EPA on Monday to discuss the federal agency's latest action. During the meeting, the congresswoman reiterated her position that the south shore of St. Croix should be [re-purposed for a new industry](#) using federal funds currently available.

"I reiterated my position that EPA's leadership as well as the White House and other federal government agencies should actively work to determine what can be done to provide resources to the Virgin Islands in repurposing the south shore of St. Croix, the site of the refinery," she said. "Given the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to actively transitioning from fossil fuels to clean energy, aiding underserved communities, creating good paying jobs – which squarely fits the needs of the St. Croix community – this appears to be an ideal time for local and federal government along with private sector to utilize the enormous grants available in both the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act to create an entire new

economic / industrial system on the islands. Although the initial news of the permit requirement may seem to be negative, this situation presents our territory with a transformational opportunity.”

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.