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OSHA Expresses 'Serious Concern' With Idled Refinery's Emergency Response Deficiencies, Lack of Plan Between Ocean Point and Port Hamilton

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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. Occupational Safety and Health Administration on Saturday shared a letter with the media that it sent to Port Hamilton Refining and Transportation following OSHA's Nov. 14 inspection of the St. Croix refinery.

Among other issues, OSHA said it was concerned about deficiencies in PHRT's emergency response operation and a dispute between PHRT and Ocean Point Terminals relative to shared emergency response management.

"Preliminarily, OSHA has determined that there are potential gaps in your emergency response capabilities. These gaps include an insufficient number of responders, lack of training for responders, and lack of procedures," OSHA said in its letter to PHRT. "Additionally, there is an ongoing dispute between Port Hamilton Refining & Transportation LLLP and Ocean Port Terminals, with whom you share emergency response resources, concerning shared utilities, EPA permits, control of assets, and emergency resources. All of these conditions could create risks for employees should an emergency occur at the facility."

OSHA said while it recognizes that the plant is currently idle, "there are still potential hazards present including, but not limited to the storage of Anhydrous Ammonia, Liquefied Petroleum Gas, and chemicals in your Amine Process. These hazards are covered under OSHA's Process Safety Management standard."

The federal agency's initial review of documents, along with interviews of management and employees, "show that while there is a fire brigade at the facility, the current structure and documentation for the fire brigade does not meet the requirements of 29 CFR 1910.156. Additionally, there are no specific procedures for responding to chemical releases; no procedures for responding to fires; a lack of onsite trained personnel available to respond; and uncertain access to emergency response equipment maintained on the Ocean Point Terminal property, including personal protective equipment and fire apparatus."

OSHA expressed concern that there does not appear to be coordination of emergency services between PHRT and Ocean Port Terminals, since Ocean Port Terminals has the bulk of emergency response personnel and equipment.

"Without pre-planned and coordinated efforts, Port Hamilton Refinery and Transportation LLLP needs to establish their emergency response independently, with refinery employees or contracted professional services, and with pre-arranged support from St. Croix's local emergency services," OSHA wrote.

The federal regulator said its inspection of the refinery is ongoing and that at the conclusion of the inspection it may issue citations for these, and/or other conditions if warranted.

"In the interim, OSHA expects that you take appropriate steps to address these deficiencies as soon as possible," OSHA said. The federal regulator also requested a written acknowledgement and a corrective action plan from PHRT with timelines and milestones for its review by December 15.

The Environmental Protection Agency [announced last week](#) 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.