Plans to Remove Dangerous Chemicals From St. Croix Refinery Gain Momentum

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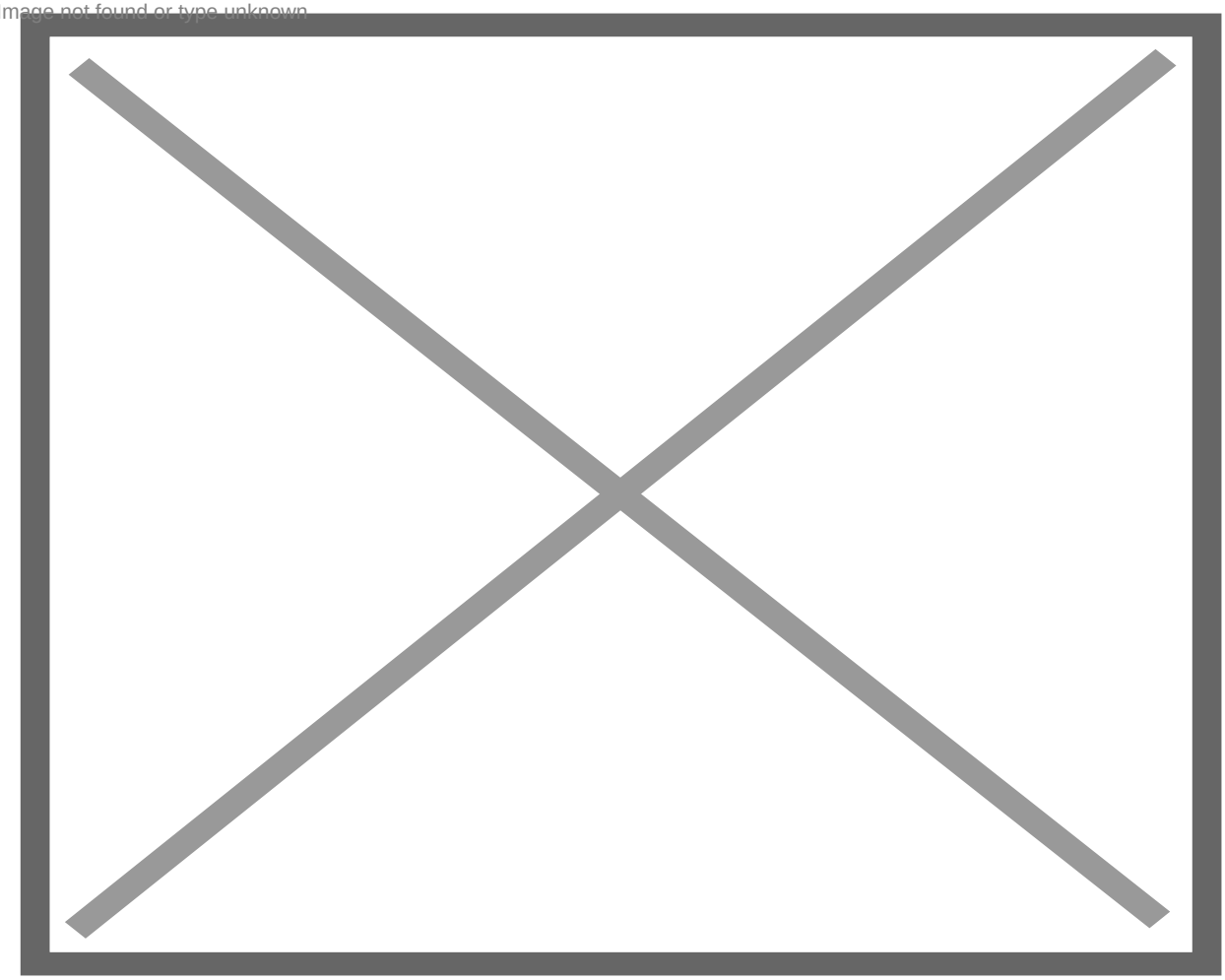

The Port Hamilton Refining and Transportation refinery on the south shore of St. Croix. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM

Now that there is regulatory approval, plans for the removal of hazardous chemicals from the Port Hamilton Refinery have shifted towards operationalization.

V.I. Territorial Management Agency Director Daryl Jaschen said on Monday that a multi-agency task force including the St. Croix Environmental Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) had been convened. Other members include the V.I. Fire & Emergency Services, the Departments of Human Services, the V.I. Dept. of Labor's OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) division, the V.I. National Guard, V.I. Police Department, the V.I. Port Authority,

the Juan F. Luis Hospital and the Government House Joint Information Center.

“The role of the task force is to work in cooperation with the EPA, OSHA, Port Hamilton Refining and Transportation, and the local community for the preparation and removal of hazardous chemicals identified by the EPA,” he said during the Bryan administration's weekly press briefing Monday.

As part of that preparation, four of the six air monitoring stations identified by the EPA have already been activated, with the remaining two coming online by the end of the week, according to Mr. Jaschen. Additionally, the task force will host a town hall meeting on February 15th from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

“The stations were designed to monitor for elevated readings of hazardous chemicals which may indicate a release at levels which may be harmful to individuals," Mr. Jaschen said. "Based on the level of chemical release, VITEMA and DPNR will be notified by the EPA and if needed, will [update] the community in a wireless message using the VITEMA Alert V.I. notification system."

The task force will now begin to meet weekly with stakeholders, Mr. Jaschen said. Regular updates will be provided through similar press briefings in the future, and the LEPC will report progress to the Virgin Islands Environmental Council (VIERC).

Mr. Jaschen also sought to reassure the public by promising that a "tabletop" exercise will precede any actual movement of the chemicals, which is anticipated in mid -March. "Once this operation begins, the EPA will conduct around-the-clock air monitoring to ensure people's safety,” he said.

The EPA will display the real-time monitoring results online on a website which is not currently available to the public, as it is being finalized, according to the VITEMA director.

As of February 9, 2023 Port Hamilton Refining and Transportation has been permitted by the EPA to do the following under the agreed Chemical Removal Plan:

- Port Hamilton and contractors are required to make repairs to the system before beginning the removal work.

- Port Hamilton contractors will remove the anhydrous ammonia by transferring the ammonia to specially designed shipping containers.

- Contractors will then purge and treat the remaining ammonia vapors from the system under closed conditions to prevent vapors from escaping.

The Liquified Petroleum Gas (LPG) will then be disposed of by being transferred into shipping containers. Contractors will depressurize the remaining hydrocarbon vapors and transfer it for destruction. Nitrogen will be used to remove any residual hydrocarbon vapors from the system.

Mr. Jaschen said the "EPA has approved this plan to remove the LPG on the condition that Port Hamilton and its contractors apply for and comply with necessary air permits from DPNR."

The final part of the removal plan is to identify and remove amine liquid containing hydrogen sulfide. This liquid will be transferred into shipping containers that will be shipped off-island.

Mr. Jaschen was unable to provide details on matters of the costs, noting that VITEMA is only playing an operational role in the matter.