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Hazardous Chemical Removal at St. Croix Refinery Begins Today

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An aerial shot of the refinery on St. Croix's south shore. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

The scheduled removal of three hazardous chemicals from Port Hamilton Refining and Transportation is scheduled to begin Tuesday April 25th, pending approval from the Environmental Protection Agency. The announcement was made during Monday's Government House press briefing by Daryl Jaschen, director of the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency.

In late October, an inspection by the EPA found [dangerous chemicals](#) being stored in heavily corroded storage units and pipes, which created the potential for "explosions" and "catastrophic

release" of harmful gasses. Two months later, the EPA [required PHRT](#) to engage experts to safely remove chemicals which the agency found were being haphazardly stored at the facility. The shuttered refinery's heavily corroded pipes and storage units, plus the lack of key documentation, posed a hazard to the surrounding communities. According to EPA Regional Administration Lisa Garcia, it was protecting the safety of those communities that spurred her agency's decision to take quick enforcement action.

Since then, said Mr. Jaschen, several state agencies including the Virgin Islands Police Department, the Department of Health and the Department of Planning and Natural Resources have been working together to develop a community support plan for the removal process. He revealed that 253,000 gallons of rich amine solution will be placed in 55 certified, specifically designed containers and removed from the territory by ship for safe sale or disposal, as will 10,500 gallon of liquid petroleum gas (LPG). A further 8500 gallons of concentrated ammonia will also be removed from the facility.

Mr. Jaschen also revealed that the EPA's approved schedule for the transportation and shipment of all three chemicals outside of the territory indicates an end time to late June/ early July. "The transportation of the hazardous chemicals by truck to the container port will be through the interconnecting fencing gate and not involve any movement on public highway," he reassured the public.

The EPA is expected to provide real time results from air monitoring stations during the removal process. According to Mr. Jaschen, a total of 14 EPA air monitoring stations will be active 24 hours a day and updates will be available to the public on the [EPA website](#). The EPA has also established a hotline at 1866 462 4789 to report any concerning odors which residents may recognize during the removal process. He stressed that any information provided to the hotline will remain anonymous. Community members have also been urged to call 911 immediately if they experience any medical issues relating to odors during the removal process.

Throughout the removal exercise, levels of hydrogen sulfide, ammonia, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide will be continuously monitored. The VITEMA director explained that the EPA has established thresholds for air monitoring limits and if that threshold is reached, key agencies will be notified of increased levels from inside the fence line, on the fence line or in the community.

A series of actions can then be taken including the deployment of roving air monitoring teams to validate possible chemical release. In the event of such an occurrence, VITEMA will send out mass notifications to the public with recommended actions. If levels do increase, VITEMA will also send out an all clear message once these levels have subsided. The director informed the public that if evacuation of potentially at-risk areas becomes necessary, the DC Canegata community center has been identified as the location for gathering.

In preparation for the exercise, a community outreach was facilitated in various locations on St. Croix last week. This was conducted by VITEMA, the VI Fire/ EMS, the Departments of Health, Human Services and Planning and Natural Resources. Residents were briefed through presentations and information sheets. The public has been urged to visit VITEMA's website www.vitema.vi.gov to sign up for the Alert VI system, to receive relevant alerts in English or Spanish by email, text or phone call while the removal is underway.