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Green Groups Call Limetree Bay An ‘Environmental Monster,’ Ask Biden’s EPA To Shut ‘Dirty Refinery’ Down

CHRISTIANSTED — Community and conservation groups filed a [legal appeal](#) today challenging the federal permit for the controversial Limetree Bay refinery on St. Croix that [had a soft-opening](#) in December 2020. The long-shuttered, pollution-plagued Limetree refinery has been one of the world’s [biggest](#) oil-processing facilities.

St. Croix Environmental Association (SEA), the [Center for Biological Diversity](#), NRDC and Sierra Club filed the petition for review of Limetree Bay’s permit with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Environmental Appeals Board. The filing faults the agency for setting lenient air-pollution standards and failing to protect a vulnerable community of color, among other concerns.

“The future of St. Croix should not be as a pollution haven for a dying industry that has caused a climate crisis,” said Jennifer Valiulis, executive director of SEA. “The character of our community is based on a lifestyle and well-being that is closely tied to nature and the environment. We want clean air, clean water, a healthy ecosystem, and the ability to create a strong resilient future based in sustainability. Limetree’s operation and the permit, as it is currently written, compromise the St. Croix community’s ability to achieve that quality of life.”

The refinery, located on the island of St. Croix, where 27 percent of residents live below the poverty line, was shut down in 2012 after a series of massive oil spills and air-pollution releases prompted the EPA to issue a \$5.4 million fine and order new pollution controls against then-owner HOVENSA. The new ownership group, Limetree Bay Ventures’ principal investor ArcLight Capital Partners, has [ties to former President Donald Trump](#), whose EPA leadership helped fast-track approval to reopen this facility.

“[Limetree Bay refinery](#) continues to be an environmental monster that Trump officials brought back to life. The Biden administration needs to take another look at this menace to local residents and marine life,” said Miyoko Sakashita, oceans program director at the Center. “Restarting this dirty refinery pollutes the air and devastates endangered corals and sea turtles.”

Last year’s reopening was complicated by delays, corroded equipment, a fire, unscheduled flares, an airborne chemical release and more oil spills. Oil giant [BP announced](#) in January that it will delay oil deliveries to the refinery until its problems are corrected and the plant fully restarts. The plant restart was rushed to meet [anticipated demand](#) for cleaner, low-sulfur [maritime fuel](#) that was required starting last year.

Hurricane Maria hit St. Croix as a powerful category 5 hurricane in September 2017, devastating the island's infrastructure. The island is still recovering today.

"St. Croix is a beautiful island, still recovering from a natural disaster. The last thing it needs is to restart this old refinery, which will belch toxic chemicals into its air and water," said Jane Williams, chair of the Sierra Club National Clean Air Team.

The petition challenges the EPA's unacceptably high limits on air pollution from the refinery while discounting that pollution by ignoring that restarting the refinery is a new source of pollution. The agency failed to adequately address the disproportionate burden that an environmental justice community will bear and it failed to provide multi-lingual access to information. Finally, the appeal challenges the EPA's cursory analysis of the detrimental impact the refinery will have on St. Croix's endangered marine life, including sea turtles and birds.

"What the Trump administration and an oil refinery have been trying here is textbook 'environmental injustice' — it's indefensible," said John Walke, clean air director for NRDC, the Natural Resources Defense Council. "A polluting oil refinery can't rise up again like a zombie, in some new incarnation, aided by reckless politicians, with the same old harmful plan. The refinery simply has to follow federal clean air laws, and the Biden-Harris administration should hold them to it."