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Hovensa Cleanup Comes to 42 Million Gallons So Far

Source staff March 11, 2008

March 9, 2008 — The amount of petroleum being cleaned up from the groundwater at the St. Croix Hovensa refinery is nearly four times that of the worst oil spill in U.S. history — the Exxon Valdez spill on the Alaskan coast in 1989.

"Since the vast network of recovery and treatment wells began pumping in 1987, nearly 42 million gallons of free product petroleum have been reclaimed from the on-site groundwater. An estimated 1.2 million gallons are still targeted for recovery," said Alan J. Steinberg, regional administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency, in a statement Friday.

The Exxon Valdez spilled about 10.8 million gallons of oil, causing a 3,000-square-mile oil slick that devastated the Prince William Sound ecosystem and still affects Alaska's fisheries after nearly 19 years. The case is still in litigation and last month went before the U.S. Supreme Court as Exxon contests the punitive damages awarded at trial.

The Hovensa project is one of the largest in U.S. history, the EPA said. Neither Steinberg nor Hovensa Vice President Alex Moorhead could be reached over the weekend for further comment.

Moorhead on Friday released background information about the leak problems at the refinery in advance of an anticipated EPA statement this week on a planned public hearing on proposed modifications to Hovensa's EPA permit.

The EPA has scheduled a meeting for 5 p.m. on Wednesday, March 12, at the Hovensa Administration Building's main auditorium in Estate Hope.

Steinberg said in his statement on the EPA website that the changes being sought "will improve petroleum waste treatment at the facility and set final goals for the ongoing groundwater cleanup at the 1500-acre refinery property."

Moorhead stated in the background information that the leak was discovered in 1982, when the company was still named Hess Oil Virgin Islands Corp. (HOVIC). He stated that "approximately 95 percent of recoverable petroleum products have been recovered" and that percentage came out to 42 million gallons of recovered petroleum product.

The statement did not indicate how much petroleum in total may have been released into the environment.

Moorhead said HOVIC notified the EPA as well as the V.I. Department of Conservation and Cultural Affairs, now known as the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, after it discovered petroleum product in the groundwater under the refinery. Hovensa continues to submit updates to both agencies, he said.

The recovered groundwater is treated in the refinery's wastewater treatment system to separate the petroleum product from the water and to ensure that the water meets DPNR's standards before it is discharged into the sea. The recovered petroleum is recycled in the refinery, according to Moorhead. Hovensa has also instituted measures to prevent future releases and this includes ensuring that all hydrocarbon and/or chemical storage tanks, which are not elevated, are tested on an annual basis for any leak, he said. The tanks are also taken out of service every 10 years for physical inspection of their mechanical integrity under actual load conditions by an EPA-allowed mass measurement method, he said. Any tank found to be leaking or that fails a test is taken out of service.

All underground hydrocarbon lines are pressure-tested annually for leaks, and process wastewater lines are hydrostatically tested at a minimum every three years for the same purpose.

Steinberg said in his statement that a 60-day public comment period on Hovensa's EPA permit changes began late last month and ends April 26, 2008.

Any interested person wishing to comment on these proposals may either submit written comments to EPA's representative at the March 12 public meeting or mail comments, no later than April 26, 2008 to Adolph Everett, Chief, RCRA Program Branch, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 290 Broadway,

22nd Floor, New York, NY 10007-1866.

Documents related to the proposed decisions can be viewed at DPNR, Attention: Syad Syadali, 46 Mars Hill, Frederiksted, or call 773-0566.

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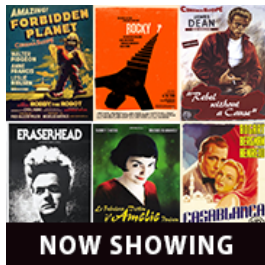
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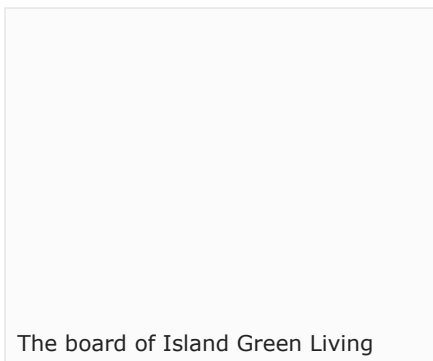
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