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NEWS

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EPA ORDERS ESSO AND TEXACO TO INVESTIGATE THE EXTENT OF CHEMICAL CONTAMINATION IN TURPENTINE RUN AQUIFER ON ST. THOMAS

NEW YORK -- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has ordered two companies to investigate into the extent of environmental problems and what corrective actions are necessary at the TuTu Well Site in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands.

In 1987, gasoline from underground storage tanks and other volatile organic compounds contaminated ground water in the Turpentine Run Aquifer. ESSO Standard Oil S.A., Limited and Texaco Caribbean, Inc. have agreed to comply with the order, which was issued under the authority of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA). This is the federal law which, among other things, regulates underground storage tanks. This most recent RCRA Order on Consent is part of a Federal enforcement initiative to rectify the problems associated with the gasoline leak.

EPA Regional Administrator Constantine Sidamon-Eristoff said, "The enforcement order directs those responsible for causing the contamination at this site to take the steps needed to restore this vital drinking water resource. The first step is to

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determine how extensive the contamination is before a remedy can be identified. The companies are to start the investigation by the Spring 1992. EPA expects the results of that investigation to be available in the Summer of 1993. Meanwhile, all those initially affected by the problem are receiving potable drinking water."

As a result of the groundwater contamination detected during the summer of 1987, EPA, with the help of the Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR), conducted a Superfund Emergency Removal Action in order to protect public health. Superfund is the federal program to address health and environmental threats associated with the uncontrolled release of hazardous substances. The actions taken in 1987 involved extensive groundwater and cistern monitoring as well as trucking clean water to affected homes and an apartment complex.

A Superfund/RCRA Order issued in 1990 required ESSO Standard Oil, S.A. Limited, Texaco Caribbean Inc. and L'Henri, Inc. (a local dry cleaning firm) to:

- * extend a public water main currently under construction by the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (VIWAPA), in cooperation with the Virgin Islands Housing Authority (VIHA), to the affected apartment complex and to any homes with contaminated drinking water;
- * provide the affected population with potable water until such time as the affected apartment complex and homes are connected to the permanent water supply; and,
- * continue the EPA well water monitoring program at the TuTu Wells Site.

The companies are currently complying with the Order.

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