



CTA-049-Island Threats-St. Eustatius

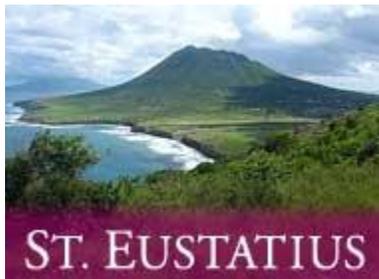
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By [Betsy Crowfoot](#), January 2, 2012

Part IV in a series exploring the potential impact of NuStar Energy's proposed oil terminal expansion on the Caribbean island of St. Eustatius.



[Part I: Tarnish on the Golden Rock: Will the Tiny Caribbean Isle of St. Eustatius Surrender to Oil Multinationals?](#)

[Part II: Residents fear the potential impact of NuStar Energy's proposed oil terminal expansion and work towards stopping the degradation.](#)

[Part III: How "Green" is the Golden Rock?](#)

Concerns are mounting about a proposed oil terminal and processing expansion on the Caribbean island of St. Eustatius (Statia), after reports of yet another oil spill: this one off the coast of [Nigeria](#). That incident saw nearly 40,000 gallons of oil leak during a transfer from a production/storage vessel to a tanker, before the malfunction was detected and stopped.

The proposed terminal site hugs iconic Signal Hill.



The news comes as NuStar Energy LLP (NuStar) petitions to expand its presence on Statia, a small, verdant, timeworn isle at the crossroads of major shipping routes in the eastern Caribbean.

Already NuStar has a large oil terminal on the north end of the island: 67 tanks with a capacity of more than 13-million barrels, and another five tanks slated to go online any day now. Earlier this year NuStar asked the Island Council to rezone a parcel of land to allow the construction of 30 to 40 more 100-foot storage and processing tanks, adjacent downtown Oranjestad.

But the increasing frequency of oil spills related to [groundings](#), mishaps and negligence has conservationists worried about the risks to Statia's environment, both on land and at sea.

Ocean Habitat at Risk

Rare sea turtles sightings around the island are logged by [Stenapa Image: Stenapa](#)



A marine park wraps around the entire five-by-two mile Dutch island. The park, established in 1996, embraces a variety of habitat: calcareous reefs and corals, volcanic rock with cracks and fissures – inhabited by a diverse array of extraordinary sea life that attracts tourists, who come here to dive. There's



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a sandy plateau on the leeward side where large populations of Queen Conch thrive, and beaches, which provide critical nesting grounds for threatened and endangered sea turtles.

The [risk](#) of pollution is palpable. In February 2002, the calling tanker Paulina dumped its bilges of oil-tainted ballast water, which went unnoticed 'til dawn. By that time, the oil had fouled the length of the island and polluted the marine park, harbor and shoreline. Nearly 10 years later, the St. Eustatius National Parks Foundation (Stenapa) has yet to receive restitution for cleanup of this incident; sources say it will likely end up in court.

Statia Response deploys an oil containment boom.



A decade earlier, one of the terminal's 24-inch pipelines ruptured, spilling oil at a rate of 8,000 barrels an hour and creating a slick some 20 miles long. In fact, there have been a dozen major tanker spills in the Caribbean – making it a 'high risk' area, according to the International Tanker Owner Pollution Federation Limited (ITOPF). One such incident – a collision between supertankers Atlantic Empress and Aegean Captain – remains the largest ship-based accident in history. The tankers, laden with more than a half-million tons of crude, collided

off Tobago during a tropical storm, killing 26 crew as 287,000 tons of oil spewed and blazed from the wreck. This was forty times the amount of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

But if the terminal expansion goes ahead, the boost in capacity of roughly 50 percent will likewise increase the number of visiting vessels, and residents worry hazards on the densely trafficked channels will multiply as well.

Bad Neighbor?

Already, 800 vessels come to Statia annually to bunker and obtain fuel. The jetty can accommodate the world's largest supertankers – up to 520,000 dead weight tonnage – but most remain on moorings and transfer offshore. About 100 will tie up at the wharf to discharge or take on oil and products.

NuStar counts on berthing and docking services, pilotage, and so on, as a revenue source, in addition to the storage and processing of oil. However, the Fortune 500 company has failed to pass on mooring fees to Stenapa, as stipulated by law.

“We've been fighting with NuStar for years to get the money from the anchorage of the tankers, which is in the law – it says in the Environmental Ordinance the tankers have to pay us,” revealed Marine Park Manager Jessica Berkel, who adds Stenapa is critically understaffed and underfunded, and needs those fees for environmental programs. “But it hasn't happened yet. It's been negotiated and negotiated for years. We hope we start collecting that soon and have the money to start supporting our programs.”



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NuStar was also criticized for overlooking spills and minimizing reportage. Researcher Anna Maitz questioned their statistics saying, "It's a question of what qualifies as 'no accident?' There are incidents ... maybe not a BP spill, but an accident: still a leak, and still harmful."

Uncontrollable Hazards

More than a dozen tropical storms and hurricanes will roll through the hurricane belt each year. Image: NOAA



According to NuStar though, theirs is the best safety and environmental record in the industry, with high ratings from the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in four of their locations (the company lists a total of 90 sites). Press releases indicate a desire to achieve that standard worldwide; and within the Statia terminal, utilize, "sophisticated safety and environmental measures to prevent pollution."

But a study of tank accidents over the last 40 years, published in the Journal of Loss Prevention, said 242 accidents in their survey weren't related to maintenance and operational errors, but harder-to-control elements such as cracks, leaks and ruptures in tanks and lines; lightning, static electricity, fire, natural disaster and even sabotage.

The wisdom in proposing a terminal so close to the populous is questionable to some. "NuStar is over-emphasizing how safety is its top priority," said Kenneth Cuvalay, Coordinator of the St. Eustatius Awareness and Development (SEAD) Movement. "The fact is that most accidents are caused by human failure. And no safety regulations will protect us in case of earthquakes or major hurricanes. Remember [Japan, Fukushima?](#)"

Particularly since the new terminal will sit in the path of The Quill.

Slumbering Giant

Looking south toward the Quill from abreast the terminal Credit: Betsy Crowfoot



The Quill, a 2,000-foot (609m) volcano, classified by the Smithsonian Institute as dormant – not extinct – due to ongoing geothermal evidence, dominates Statia's profile. Although last erupted roughly 1,600 years ago, the continual presence of very hot groundwater (158F/70C) on the flanks of volcano, "strongly supports the case for activity in the very recent past," according to a related study published by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie Van

Wetenschappen).



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More critically, that report continues, “Particularly at risk from future activity is the town of Oranjestad, which lies directly below the notch, or low point of The Quill’s crater rim. From this notch, a [pyroclastic flow](#) fan can be seen to be directed towards the southern part of the present town. The inescapable conclusion is that all areas of settlement on St. Eustatius require immediate evacuation in the event of future activity.”

The proposed terminal expansion is less than one mile from town.

“What safety regulation is able to evacuate all Statia’s inhabitants in case something happens?” Cuvalay asked. “Which fire department will come to assist in case of major fire? How is Statia’s hospital going to handle casualties on a large scale? We will be trapped on a small island with only the ocean to flee into. We find that a very disturbing thought.”

Time is Running Out

Although work has begun on the prospective site, NuStar insists they are still in the planning stages of the project. This includes approximately 31 tanks for the storage and processing of some 11.8 million barrels of hydrocarbon products such as crude oil, fuel oil, jet fuel, gasoil and gasoline. It also includes a second, more than mile-long jetty, a pipeline of undisclosed design and location necessary to transfer the oil around or over Signal Hill, and a related power generating facility, according to the [Memorandum of the Environmental Impact Assessment](#) (EIA). The tanks would be leased to undisclosed tenants.

“And they (NuStar) don’t make that a secret – which I can applaud them for. At least I know what their objective is about. ‘We are here to make interest, whatever the cost may be.’”

Opponents have encouraged concerned citizens to appeal to the Island Council and The Hague to resist changes to the Spatial Development Plan which would allow NuStar to build the tanks near town. Walter Hellebrand, Director of the St. Eustatius Monuments Foundation (SEMF), reminded residents, “The law is there for them to use,” and that even if the spatial plan is altered, objections can be submitted.

Meanwhile others called for a vote to allow Statians to decide for themselves whether to allow the terminal – or not.

“I believe that the people of St. Eustatius still deserve the right by referendum to determine their own future and that of their children,” said James Russell, in the St. Maarten [Daily Herald](#), likening the terminal proposal to, “a tiny Caribbean community residing on what will be one of the region’s largest powder kegs.”

“NuStar’s objectives are not based on humanity,” added Cuvalay. “And they don’t make that a secret – which I can applaud them for. At least I know what their objective is about. ‘We are here to make interest, whatever the cost may be.’”

Members of Parliament are expected to visit Statia January 8, 2012, to assess the proposal for the terminal expansion.



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The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing"....Edmund Burke