

**STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE ROBERT D.
PICKERSGILL, MINISTER, WATER LAND, ENVIRONMENT
AND CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE NOXIOUS FUMES
POLLUTION INCIDENT, JUNE 28, 2012**

At approximately 10:55am on Thursday, June 28, 2012 the police received a report of noxious fumes impacting the area of the Portmore Toll Plaza and reports that the staff at the Portmore Toll Plaza was being affected. The first responders: Jamaica Fire Brigade, Police and the JDF Coastguard responded immediately. The findings were determined **to be a pollution incident**. The Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODEPM) was immediately advised. Simultaneously, measures were being taken by the Jamaica Infrastructure Operators (JIO) to rush affected staff off for medical attention at a medical facility in Portmore.

I am advised that seventeen staff members employed to the JIO sought medical attention and that five were treated. None was admitted to hospital. It is noteworthy that none of the four security guards on duty at the location at the time of the reported incident reported being affected.

Made July 12, 2012.

No impact from the noxious fumes was reported from other members of the public and there has been no reported case of livestock debilitation.

The first responders were subsequently joined by response teams from NEPA, Ministry of Health, Marine Police, ODPEM and other government agencies. The ODPEM invoked emergency procedures and after consultation with the police and the JIO ordered the closure of the Portmore Toll Plaza and began issuing media advisories. The Toll Plaza was closed for approximately six hours. Offices in the vicinity of New Port West area were evacuated.

The Most Honourable Prime Minister, Mrs Portia Simpson-Miller and I received constant updates on the operations and ongoing investigations being conducted by the response teams. While the hardworking professionals were undertaking investigations the Opposition was busy issuing a most misleading, mischievous and unfounded statements to which the Government responded as outlined in my Statement of June 29, 2012.

I am happy to report that despite the attempted distraction created by the Opposition the response teams remained determined and committed to the investigations as they sought to identify the source and cause of the incident.

Determining the source and cause of the pollution incident was the responsibility of the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA). NEPA adopted environmental epidemiology techniques as it sought to determine the cause and the source of the noxious fumes.

The techniques involved:

- environmental search of the geographical area stretching from Hunts Bay in the East, to the Kingston Terminal Ports at Gordon Cays and extending into Port Henderson, in St. Catherine;
- chemical inventory determination and verification of the holders and handlers of petroleum and petroleum-based products;
- environmental sampling (marine water and beach sand);

Additionally, there were interviews of Toll Booth Operators (and other) personnel and issuing of media advisories.

I am pleased to advise the nation that NEPA has been successful in determining **both the cause and source of the pollution incident. NEPA arrived at its conclusions based on:**

- the findings from the environmental inspection and assessments
- discussions with management representatives of the Jamaica Infrastructure Operators;
- interviews of staff affected (and not affected) by the incident;
- laboratory analyses and the returns from samples and environmental specimens submitted;
- GIS and GPS referencing;
- manipulation of data sets; and
- the use of meteorological and oceanic information.

Laboratories, local and overseas, have confirmed the presence of petrochemicals such as alkane, xylene, dimethylbenzene, naphthalenes and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in the marine water samples; alkane in the sand sample, and the presence of

long-chained alkane in air conditioning filters and in the personal protective equipment (respirators) worn by the staff at the toll plaza.

Further, the investigations found that off-loading from the ship and bunkering activities by providers of bunkering services took place within the zone of influence, that is, at the Petrojam pier, off-shore Port Royal and at the Kingston Terminal at Gordon Cay.

The findings show that all samples and specimens contained similar pollutants which would originate from petroleum-based products. NEPA has concluded that the source of the noxious odour was petroleum-based and may have occurred from the Petrojam unloading activities during the morning of June 28. Information submitted by Petrojam confirms the loss of a significant quantity of kerosene during loading operations at the port. Petrojam has started an investigation into the occurrence and has called-in the police in furtherance of this exercise.

This pollution incident investigation has identified areas of weaknesses in environmental management and stewardship which require tightening. Areas such as:

- reviewing the application of the **polluter pays principle** to seek redress for environmental pollution;
- tightening the incident reporting requirements;
- reviewing the environmental permitting of bunkering services;
- developing an inventory of private sector environmental capacities; and
- bolstering equipment stock and thus strengthening the government regulatory agencies capacity to accurately measure environmental parameters and reduce the determination time.

I have instructed that the CEO of NEPA bring these matters to the attention of the Chairman and Members of the National Resources Conservation Authority (NRCA) for the necessary workplan, costing and an implementation schedule to be determined.

On behalf of the government I wish to empathise with the staff employed to the Portmore Toll Plaza who was affected by this unfortunate occurrence. I wish to commend the response teams: members of the JCF, JDF and the Jamaica Fire Brigade, the Director General, ODPEM and the CEO NEPA and their hardworking and committed staff, private sector providers and the Pesticides Research Laboratory-Department of Chemistry, UWI and all stakeholders who volunteered assistance and responded to information requests to allow for the successful completion of these investigations.

Thank you all!