

May 29, 2026

Members of the Port Townsend City Council

Port Townsend, Washington

RE: Port Townsend Paper Company — White Liquor Safety and Community Risk

Dear Members of the Port Townsend City Council,

I am copying members of the press on this letter intentionally. The matter I am raising is urgent, as it involves public safety, and the community deserves to know that it is being brought to your attention.

Eleven people are dead in Longview. A 900,000-gallon tank of white liquor — the caustic chemical at the heart of kraft paper production — imploded at the Nippon Dynawave mill on May 26th. Governor Ferguson has called it the deadliest industrial accident in modern Washington State history.

Port Townsend Paper Company runs the same process. Same chemical. Similar tanks. On 450 acres bordering Port Townsend Bay, less than two miles from our downtown, in a community of 10,000 people.

Port Townsend is a boating, fishing, arts, and tourism community. Our bay is not a backdrop — it is our economy, our identity, and our way of life.

A white liquor release into Port Townsend Bay would be catastrophic: caustic sodium hydroxide and sodium sulfide pouring into the waters where our fishing boats work, where kayakers and sailors launch, where visitors come from across the region. The marine environment that supports our charter fishing industry, our boat yards, our waterfront businesses, and our tourism economy could be devastated for years.

The 2025 spill of 114,000 gallons of untreated industrial wastewater into the bay — one of thirteen documented spills since 2013 — gives us a preview of what inadequate containment looks like at this facility. A Longview-scale event would be an order of magnitude worse.

We also want to be clear: the 300 workers at Port Townsend Paper Company are our neighbors, our friends, and members of this community. They deserve to work in a facility with tanks that have been inspected, maintained, and certified safe. The workers who died in Longview went to work that Tuesday morning expecting to come home. Protecting Port Townsend Paper Company (PTPC) employees from that fate is not in conflict with holding the company accountable — it is the same goal.

A community that loses its mill to disaster loses those 300 jobs along with everything else. The time to act is before a tragedy, not after.

The nearly 2,000 odor complaints filed by Port Townsend residents between 2016 and 2021 are not the complaints of people being overly sensitive. They are the documented record of a community being repeatedly exposed to toxic sulfur compounds at harmful levels. The rotten egg and rotten cabbage smells our neighbors have reported for years are hydrogen sulfide, methyl mercaptan, dimethyl sulfide, and dimethyl disulfide — the same family of chemicals produced by the kraft pulping process that uses white liquor. A 2024 federal investigation by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry confirmed that these compounds were being measured near PTPC at concentrations above EPA's chronic health reference level during mill operations — meaning long-term exposure poses a documented health risk to our community. Eye irritation, throat and respiratory inflammation, fatigue, nausea, headache, and dizziness are all established health effects at the exposure levels being recorded here. This is not a future risk. This is harm that is already occurring, already documented by federal scientists, and already being borne by the people of Port Townsend. A Longview-scale release of the same chemicals in liquid form — hundreds of thousands of gallons at once rather than through a stack — would be catastrophic by any measure.

We do not know how large PTPC's white liquor storage tanks are. We do not know when they were last inspected. White liquor is not covered by the EPA's Risk Management Program, so there is no public safety plan on file. What we do know — drawn entirely from official EPA ECHO enforcement data — raises serious questions about this mill's safety and maintenance culture:

PTPC has been in High Priority Violation of the Clean Air Act for all 12 of the last 12 quarters — a perfect record of noncompliance — with 23 informal enforcement actions and only \$63,750 in penalties over five years.

The mill has had 13 or more documented industrial spills into Port Townsend Bay since 2013, with Clean Water Act violations recorded every quarter for three years running.

A June 2025 hazardous waste inspection found specific failures in preparedness, prevention, and emergency procedures — exactly the category most relevant to a white liquor tank failure.

In April and May 2026 — this month — the state issued two new formal administrative orders for Clean Water Act violations.

Total penalties across all environmental statutes over five years: \$99,750. For an industrial operation of this scale, that is not deterrence. It is a cost of doing business.

For context: the Nippon Dynawave mill in Longview had a similar pattern of citations and unresolved enforcement actions before 11 workers died. PTPC's daily production output actually exceeds Nippon Dynawave's, suggesting comparable volumes of white liquor in use and storage.

I am respectfully requesting that the City Council take the following actions:

1. Formally request that the Washington Department of Ecology conduct an immediate, independent inspection of PTPC's white liquor storage infrastructure — including tank age, condition, secondary containment capacity, and last inspection dates.
2. Direct the City's Emergency Management coordinator to meet with Jefferson County Emergency Management and PTPC to review and update the community emergency response plan specifically for a white liquor or caustic chemical release near Port Townsend Bay.
3. Publicly request that PTPC voluntarily disclose its white liquor tank capacities and most recent inspection records.
4. Write to EPA Region 10 and the U.S. Chemical Safety Board urging that any regulatory findings from the Longview investigation be applied immediately to PTPC and all other kraft mills in Washington State.

Our community deserves answers while there is still time to ask them. The window to act — while this disaster is fresh, while regulators are paying attention, and before something similar happens here — is now.

I have attached a five-page community report compiled from official EPA enforcement data documenting PTPC's full compliance history.

Respectfully,

David Ginsberg

Port Townsend, WA



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