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Linden Mayor Derek Armstead Raises Serious Public Safety Concerns Over Phillips 66 Refinery Lockout, Stands with Union Workers

Mayor says protecting Linden residents is his number one responsibility and demands assurances that emergency response capabilities remain fully operational at one of the Northeast's largest refineries.

LINDEN, NJ — Linden Mayor Derek Armstead is raising serious concerns about the safety of Linden residents following the lockout of nearly 400 union workers at the Phillips 66 Bayway Refinery and Linden Terminal, including employees responsible for emergency response operations inside the facility.

While expressing his strong support for the workers represented by Teamsters Local 877, Armstead emphasized that the dispute raises an even larger concern: the safety and well-being of the thousands of residents who live and work near one of the Northeast's largest petroleum refineries.

"As mayor, my number one responsibility is the safety of our residents, and that responsibility comes before everything else," said Armstead. "I stand firmly with the hardworking union men and women who have been locked out of their jobs, but I am deeply concerned about what their absence means for the safety of our community. We are talking about a major petroleum refinery, and many of these workers are the very people trained to respond when an emergency occurs. The people of Linden deserve to know that their safety is not being compromised because of a labor dispute."

The workers were locked out Monday afternoon following the expiration of a contract extension. The union's previous contract expired October 1, and negotiations have yet to produce a new agreement.

The magnitude of the Bayway Refinery's operations underscores the mayor's concerns.

According to Phillips 66, the Bayway Refinery occupies approximately 1,235 acres along New York Harbor in Linden, about 13 miles southwest of Manhattan. Originally built in 1909, the facility has the capacity to process approximately 275,000 barrels of crude oil per day, with a total processing capacity of approximately 285,000 barrels per day.

The refinery produces gasoline, ultra-low sulfur diesel, jet fuel, propane, home heating oil, and other petroleum products distributed throughout the East Coast by pipeline, barge, rail, and truck.

The industrial complex also includes a polypropylene manufacturing plant capable of producing up to 775 million pounds of plastic material annually.

The facility's extensive operations include crude oil distillation, catalytic cracking, hydrodesulfurization, and other complex industrial processes that require specialized training, safety procedures, and emergency response capabilities.

For Mayor Armstead, those numbers illustrate why maintaining experienced emergency response personnel is so critical.

"Think about the scale of what we are talking about," Armstead said. "This is an enormous industrial complex processing hundreds of thousands of barrels of petroleum every day, with highly specialized equipment, combustible materials, and operations that require constant attention to safety. This is not a facility where you can afford to take shortcuts or leave anything to chance. The safety of our residents must always come first."

Of particular concern to the mayor is the lockout of union employees who ordinarily serve on the refinery's internal emergency response teams, including fire brigades and oil spill response personnel.

"This is not just about what happens inside the refinery gates," Armstead said. "An emergency at a facility of this size has the potential to impact neighborhoods, families, businesses, and first responders throughout Linden and the surrounding communities. The people who have been locked out possess specialized training, institutional knowledge, and years of experience responding to the unique hazards associated with refinery operations. You cannot simply overlook the importance of that experience."

While Phillips 66 has indicated that it intends to maintain safe operations using qualified personnel, Mayor Armstead said the company must provide more detailed assurances regarding its emergency preparedness during the lockout.

"I am not interested in waiting until something goes wrong to find out whether adequate safeguards were in place," Armstead said. "I want to know today that the refinery has the trained personnel, equipment, and emergency response capabilities necessary to handle a fire, explosion, hazardous materials incident, or any other emergency. These are legitimate questions, and the residents of Linden deserve clear answers."

Mayor Armstead is calling on Phillips 66 to provide the City of Linden with a comprehensive briefing on emergency response staffing, fire suppression capabilities, hazardous materials response procedures, and coordination with local emergency services during the lockout.

He also stressed that Linden's municipal emergency responders should not be expected to compensate for any reduction in the refinery's internal emergency response capabilities.

"Our Linden firefighters, police officers, and emergency personnel are exceptional professionals who put their lives on the line to protect our community," Armstead said. "But they should never be placed in a position where they are expected to fill gaps in a refinery's specialized emergency response operations because of a contract dispute. Public safety cannot become collateral damage in labor negotiations."

Beyond the immediate safety concerns, Armstead expressed his unwavering support for the union workers and their families, emphasizing their contributions to the refinery and the broader Linden community.

"These hardworking men and women have dedicated years of their lives to this facility," Armstead said. "They work long hours, perform demanding and sometimes dangerous jobs, and help keep one of the region's most important industrial operations running. They deserve respect, fair treatment, and a contract that recognizes the value they bring to the company."

The mayor urged Phillips 66 leadership to return to the bargaining table in good faith and work toward a fair agreement that brings the experienced workforce back to their jobs as quickly as possible.

"Phillips 66 is an important part of Linden's economy, and we want the company to succeed," Armstead said. "But being a good corporate neighbor means more than providing jobs and contributing to the local economy. It means respecting your workforce and recognizing your responsibility to the community that surrounds your facility."

Armstead concluded with a direct message to company leadership.

"I will always stand up for the working men and women of Linden, and I will always put the safety of our residents first," Armstead said. "Those two responsibilities go hand in hand. I am calling on Phillips 66 to negotiate a fair agreement, bring these experienced workers back to their jobs, and provide our community with the assurances it deserves. The safety of Linden families is not negotiable."

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