



THE VIRGIN ISLANDS WATER & POWER AUTHORITY CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS NEWS RELEASE

(340) 774-3552 • communications@viwapa.vi / www.viwapa.vi

December 12, 2023

WAPA Welcomes EPA Study Confirming Lead Levels Much Lower Than First Reported

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS – CEO and Executive Director Andrew Smith of the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (“WAPA” or “Authority”) welcomed the recent results of sequential sampling of water on St. Croix conducted by the Environmental Protection Agency. The sampling was conducted in November after initial reports in September indicated elevated levels of lead in the water in certain communities on St. Croix.

After reviewing the follow-up study, Smith said "the EPA's investigation has validated that the initial testing at the St. Croix distribution meters didn't provide a comprehensive view of WAPA's water quality in relation to lead levels. We appreciate that our customers' concerns can now be somewhat alleviated. Despite current progress, however, we will continue to work on projects that provide safe and clean water to homes."

In the sequential sampling, 11 homes were tested with a total of 119 samples taken at the tap. Of the three samples found above the EPA's 15 parts per billion (ppb) Lead Action Level, two indicated the lead is likely stemming from the local plumbing within the faucet or the aerator. The third result, closer to the distribution meter, indicated the lead is likely from the lead plumbing components in and around the meter. As such, EPA has advised WAPA that the levels of lead found at the private home taps are consistent and on par with levels seen in other communities across the United States.

Before the sequential sampling study came in, indicating lower levels of lead, WAPA took proactive steps to provide drinking water vouchers to customers in the impacted areas and began a comprehensive public education campaign, in partnership with other government agencies, to inform residents and business owners about lead and copper in the water supply. Additional testing is being planned to confirm the lower levels of lead captured in EPA's most recent report. Once results are confirmed, the no drinking water advisory issued in October will be lifted.

"As we speak, EPA point-of-use lead removal pitchers and faucet filters are on order," said CEO Smith. "Although our lead and copper levels have been determined to be far lower, we want to maintain our commitment to quality water and will be providing filters to eligible customers within the coming weeks," he added.

These measures also coincide with WAPA's long-standing initiatives to address the St. Croix communities where brown and red water have been of concern. Water filters and hydrants being installed across the island with automatic flushing controls will move standing water along in the pipes to minimize the occurrence of brown and red water. By end of January, all service line components will be replaced with no-lead materials for the 36 St. Croix sites originally identified as having elevated levels of lead in the

water. This is the first phase of WAPA's lead abatement program funded by the EPA's Safe Drinking Water Act. WAPA will bring in additional experts this week to assist in providing solutions utilizing approved food grade additives as part of its existing Corrosion Control Treatment program. Locally, WAPA has expanded its St. Croix team to include another member with expertise in the requirements of an EPA certified water laboratory.

Even further, a larger project under WAPA's prudent replacement plan funded by FEMA will allow for the complete overhaul of St. Croix's aging water infrastructure by replacing all mainlines, service lines, pipes, tanks, and pump stations at an anticipated cost of \$1.5B. This work has already begun with a sub-grant award of \$30M to contract master planning and conceptual design. The prudent replacement of systems on St. Thomas and St. John is currently in the application phase with FEMA.

The Environmental Protection Agency will host a hybrid townhall meeting on Wednesday, December 13, at 5:30pm at the Rotary Club West to update the public about the latest findings. Those who wish to attend virtually may do so [virtually through Zoom](#) or for more details, visit: [U.S. Virgin Islands Drinking Water | US EPA](#).

"We are proud of the significant progress we've made and look forward to what is ahead of us," Smith remarked. "Our goals are not always easy to attain, and our challenges are great, but WAPA's employees are talented and committed to serving the people of the Virgin Islands. I don't see that ever changing," Smith concluded.

###

About WAPA: The Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority is an autonomous agency of the Virgin Islands Government which produces and distributes electricity and drinking water to residential and commercial customers in the territory. WAPA was created by the Fifth Legislature of the Virgin Islands in 1964 through Act No. 1248. Today, WAPA generates electrical power at production plants on St. Thomas and St. Croix and distributes electrical service through smart grids to customers on St. Thomas, St. Croix, St. John, Hassel Island, and Water Island. Potable water is distributed to almost 13,000 customers through water lines and standpipes. WAPA also has the responsibility of installing and maintaining streetlights.

(340) 774-3552 (STT/STJ) • (340) 773-2250 (STX) |  Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority |  @VIWAPA