



THE VIRGIN ISLANDS WATER & POWER AUTHORITY CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS NEWS RELEASE

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Figure 1: Leadership members Jean-Pierre Oriol, Commissioner at the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Noel Hodge, Chief Operating Officer of Water at the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (WAPA), Don Gregoire, Director of Water - STX at WAPA, Shanell Petersen, Director of Corporate Communications at WAPA, Reuben Molloy, Assistant Commissioner at the Department of Health highlighted above provide relevant updates to St. Croix's business community.

WAPA Updates Businesses and Private Organizations on the Status of Its Clean and Safe Water Actions on St. Croix

US VIRGIN ISLANDS - The Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (“WAPA” or the “Authority”) hosted a virtual town hall meeting on Wednesday attended by St. Croix business owners and non-profit organizations. Several agencies reported on the status of the clean water action initiatives addressing lead and copper findings and red and brown water in certain areas on St. Croix.

Initial findings in September reported lead in the water at 36 sites, however, sequential sampling in November by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proved to be at substantially lower levels than originally reported. WAPA’s Communications Director Shanell Petersen opened the town hall by assuring attendees that the utility remains committed to providing safe and clean water for the people of the Territory.

Don Gregoire, Water Systems Director for St. Croix reported that 52,500 water vouchers have been distributed to 2,625 customers in the impacted areas. Vouchers are still available to eligible customers who have not received the water coupons by visiting WAPA’s business office at Sunny Isle. Beginning January 5, 2024, eligible customers who have utilized WAPA’s water during the last six months will see a

\$75 bill credit to be used until the amount expires. With funding from DPNR's Clean Water Drinking Fund, pitcher and faucet filters will also be distributed in January 2024. WAPA continues to flush pipes daily, install water hydrants, and replace brass fixtures in service lines to ensure clean and safe water, Gregoire said.

During the town hall, it was reported that the installation of all lead-free parts has been completed in 15 out of the 36 affected areas, with the remaining work scheduled for completion in January.

Commissioner Jean P. Oriol, of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, which serves as WAPA's local regulatory agency, stated that historical data has confirmed that overall, the St. Croix water system does not have a lead and copper issue that threatens the safety of its residents. However, out of an "abundance of caution" an initiative to test the water across the island has begun. WAPA urges residents, businesses, and schools across the island who are interested in free lead testing of their tap water to sign up by emailing communications@viwapa.vi. The testing initiative begins this Saturday, December 23, 2023. A total of 80 locations are being selected throughout St. Croix.

Dr. Esther Ellis, Epidemiologist at the Virgin Islands Department of Health (DOH), confirmed that 1270 children ages 0-6, have been tested for lead. Two children have tested positive for lead, but the source of the lead contamination has not yet been confirmed, while three have tested positive for copper. Dr. Ellis also noted that DOH is awaiting results for fifty other tests from off-island laboratories and confirmed that capillary testing is the very best method to determine lead levels in the blood. Dr. Ellis cautioned that lead exposure can also occur from other sources including water, paint, soil, car batteries, imported toys, cookware, and spices.

WAPA's Chief Operating Officer for Water, Noel Hodge, also confirmed that while WAPA has complied with testing requirements by the EPA, the utility will begin testing more frequently to ensure a quality water supply. COO Hodge has also said that recommendations from water quality experts for safely decreasing corrosion in underground pipes and fixtures are under review. The corrosion control program is expected to show results within the next six months. WAPA anticipates FEMA funding at \$1.5B for prudent replacement of St. Croix's entire water infrastructure with applications also filed for St. Thomas and St. John.

The business town hall also supported by VITEMA, EPA, and other local agencies offered Spanish, French Creole and American Sign Language translations. The recording of the livestream can be viewed on YouTube at <http://tinyurl.com/5x5pevmx>

The speakers welcomed questions and suggestions from the business owners. They also announced plans for a community town hall in January, where updates on water will be shared. Those seeking ongoing information can visit www.cleanwaterusvi.com.

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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.