

The Virgin Islands Consortium

New Joint Policy on Residential Generators in Virgin Islands May Burden Low-Income Households

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In a move that could disproportionately impact lower-income families, the V.I. Department of Planning and Natural Resources and the V.I. Police Department have announced a new territory-wide policy regulating the use of residential generators.

The policy, aimed at preventing air and noise pollution, also places specific requirements on generators that could make them unattainable for those who cannot afford higher-end models.

The policy is being introduced in the wake of an increase in emergency backup generators due to frequent hurricanes, storms, and tropical depressions affecting the

Virgin Islands. While its goal is to prevent the release of additional harmful air contaminants and control noise nuisance, it imposes several criteria for generator installation and use, which could potentially place a financial burden on lower-income households.

Under the new policy, residential generators (portable or non-portable) are allowed to be used in emergency situations such as power outages due to natural disasters or a deviation in voltage or frequency. They are also permitted for maintenance and testing, based on recommendations from the manufacturer. However, these units must adhere to strict installation and maintenance requirements, including installation according to manufacturer specifications, regular maintenance as recommended by the manufacturer, placement in well-ventilated areas away from doors and windows, and compliance with local and federal air and noise pollution laws.

Additionally, the generators are subject to inspection and testing by the Department of Planning and Natural Resources to ensure compliance with air pollution regulations and the Anti-Noise Ordinance. This ordinance restricts sounds from residential generators not to exceed 60 dBA. The noise output for standard, portable generators built on open steel frames typically ranges from approximately 69 dBA to around 80 dBA, varying based on the generator's size and specific model.

Although the policy exempts generators from permits under the Virgin Islands Air Pollution Control Act Rules and Regulations, the rigorous manufacturer specifications and placement guidelines may require professional installation and high-quality units. These stipulations could effectively price out households that cannot afford to purchase expensive generators and pay for their proper installation.

While the intention behind the policy is to maintain a balanced approach to ensuring public health and comfort, the unspoken outcome may be a form of socioeconomic exclusion. Those who cannot afford compliance with these regulations may find themselves without a vital source of power in emergency situations.

Residents are urged to carefully read the policy details and assess the feasibility of adhering to the new regulations before purchasing new generators. Compliance with the policy is not optional and failure to meet its guidelines could result in enforcement actions.