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WAPA CEO Says Brown Water Isn't Hazardous; Anticipates Service Disruptions Amid Rehabilitation

WAPA / **Published On September 12, 2023 05:33 AM /**

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A St. Croix resident's filter after processing WAPA-supplied water.

WAPA CEO Andrew Smith told the public that the brown water in parts of St. Croix isn't unsafe for use, speaking at the Government House weekly press briefing on Monday.

Smith addressed ongoing disruptions as WAPA works on system rehabilitation, stating that consumers should prepare for interruptions in service in affected areas, including the towns of Frederiksted and Christiansted, as well as Clifton Hill and Campo Rico.

In a recent update before the Senate, Smith attributed the brown water to a series of issues including antiquated iron pipes and low water levels in storage tanks across St. Croix. During last week's testimony, he further explained that testing had been done at sites within the company's

primary water distribution system, not at user endpoints. However, WAPA has now designed an extended sampling program proposed to the EPA. "The additional sampling across St. Croix will provide definitive data on the impact of customers most and least impacted by the aging pipes and low water pressure," Smith said.

WAPA is also in discussions with the Department of Planning and Natural Resources on establishing a residential filtration program for impacted customers. Smith reiterated that despite the water's discoloration, it continues to meet U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards. He added that the lingering odor of sargassum in some areas' water supply did not trigger immediate safety concerns.

Smith emphasized that the utility continues to treat the water to reduce corrosion and will update the community once expanded sampling results are received. "Discoloration of water, while certainly unappealing, does not mean that the water is unsafe," he concluded.