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Puerto Rico National Guard's Fire-Fighting Helicopter Aids in Battle Against Bovoni Landfill Blaze in USVI

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Support from the Puerto Rico National Guard by way of a special fire-fighting helicopter will provide vital assistance to the U.S. Virgin Islands as authorities continue to battle a vegetation fire at the Bovoni Landfill.

That's according to VITEMA Director Daryl Jaschen in an emergency press briefing on Wednesday afternoon. Mr. Jaschen informed residents that the low-flying helicopter, which carries a large bucket capable of holding more than 650 gallons of water, will begin flying over the landfill and surrounding areas early on Wednesday afternoon.

Mr. Jaschen explained that the helicopter will make trips to and from the ocean, collecting seawater which will then be used to douse the flames. He cautioned the public about the initial

ramifications of this exercise. “As we start putting this water on the fire, you’re gonna see an increased amount of smoke”, he warned, who also asked nearby residents to shelter in place, and keep windows and doors closed.

The Bovoni Landfill will remain closed on Wednesday, August 20th, as several agencies across the Virgin Islands work collaboratively to extinguish the fire that began nearly a week ago. Mr. Jaschen says while the helicopter makes trips to collect water, the ground crew will tackle the green waste left at the landfill since Hurricane Maria, to ensure the entire fire is put out. People are asked to generally avoid the area and cooperate with the V.I. Police Department which will be on the ground to maintain safety and public order.

On Monday, after the stubborn landfill fire had resisted suppression efforts for days, Governor Albert Bryan announced a state of emergency. In his update, Mr. Jaschen said that since this declaration, a unified command was formed, which includes the VI Fire and EMS as the lead agency, the Department of Health, the Department of Education, VIPD, the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, the National Guard and VITEMA. He shared that crews have been working for up to twenty hours a day to resolve the crisis.

Residents with health concerns are asked to contact 911 if their situation worsens. Rueben Molloy, deputy commissioner at the V.I. Department of Health says the safety and well-being of the community are of utmost importance. “There may be a risk of runoff from the extinguishing efforts contaminating nearby bodies of water. Residents are urged to avoid contact with any water that may have been affected by the fire fighting activities”, warned Mr. Molloy.