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# FAA Proposes \$477,000 Fine on Virgin Islands Port Authority; VIPA Responds

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**Aerial view of the Cyril E. King Airport in St. Thomas. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM**

The Federal Aviation Administration has announced a proposed civil penalty of \$477,000 against the Virgin Islands Port Authority for alleged improper maintenance at the Cyril E. King International Airport in St. Thomas.

The FAA's allegations, published on Tuesday, stem from inspections conducted in 2021 and 2022, which revealed a series of violations at the airport. These infractions include cracked runway and taxiway pavements, improperly graded and drained runway safety zones, and obstructions in those zones. Other cited issues include faded or incorrect runway markings, inaccurate signage,

malfunctioning or missing runway edge lights, and the mishandling of fuel storage and dispensation. Additionally, the FAA has pointed out VIPA's failure to issue a crucial Notice to Air Missions (NOTAM) that would have alerted air carriers about a specific runway issue.

In a statement issued Thursday, VIPA said that upon receiving the FAA's enforcement letter, it swiftly addressed the matter. The authority's executive director, Carlton Dowe, elaborated on the situation, stating that while some of the discrepancies were already known to the authority, several were introduced for the first time in the August 23 communication from the FAA.

Mr. Dowe emphasized VIPA's proactive stance, noting that they have already responded to the FAA. "Our response was accompanied by extensive documentation which shows that many of the highlighted deficiencies were either addressed, are in the process of being rectified, or simply do not exist," Mr. Dowe stated. He also underlined VIPA's ongoing collaboration with the FAA's Atlanta Airports District Office to strategize and roll out capital improvement projects addressing these compliance concerns.

Highlighting VIPA's dedication to safety and infrastructure, Mr. Dowe revealed a significant investment in airfield safety at Cyril E. King Airport. "We're channeling over \$29 million into safety enhancements, with more projects, including runway rehabilitation, in the pipeline," he said. He further clarified the operational challenges posed by having a single runway at Cuyril E. King Airport. "Complete shutdowns for repairs aren't feasible. We've phased our repairs and mostly scheduled them for nighttime to align with airline schedules," Mr. Dowe added.

While the dialogues and discussions with the FAA continue, Mr. Dowe assured the public of uninterrupted operations at the airport.