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Limited Opening of Bovoni Landfill for Trash Haulers Announced as Coalpit-Like Fire Persists

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A Black Hawk helicopter from the Puerto Rico National Guard delivered 66,000 gallons of seawater to douse the flames at the Bovoni Landfill in St. Thomas. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

The Bovoni Landfill fire, despite over a week of rigorous firefighting efforts, continues to smolder, drawing a comparison to a lingering coalpit by VI Fire and Emergency Medical Services Director Daryl George.

This insight was shared during a Government House press briefing on Friday, where updates on the multi-agency response were provided. Mr. George emphasized the progress made, particularly noting the significant reduction in the dense smoke that had blanketed the area. This achievement,

in part, was due to relentless firefighting strategies, including the use of a Black Hawk helicopter from the Puerto Rico National Guard, which delivered 66,000 gallons of seawater to douse the flames.

The smoke had earlier forced the closure of the Bertha C Boschulte (BCB) Middle School and the Antilles School, as well as prompted a declaration of emergency by Governor Albert Bryan. Mobile units from the Department of Health were dispatched to provide on-site healthcare support to first responders and community residents affected by the heavy smoke.

Now, recent air quality tests performed by the VI National Guard's 33rd Civil Support Team near the two closed schools have found no hazardous materials. However, virtual instruction at BCB will still move forward as planned on Monday.

On Friday, the landfill opened up to accept loads from trash haulers, who have been asked to cooperate with officials directing them towards new access routes that will prevent interference with the ongoing firefighting efforts.

V.I. Territorial Emergency Management Agency Executive Director Daryl Jaschen thanked the community for its support, noting that residents and businesses on St. Thomas and St. John have been providing firefighters with meals and drinks to sustain them as they worked to battle the blaze.

The fire started in the "green waste" area of the landfill where vegetation cleared in the aftermath of the 2017 hurricanes was dumped. While no longer a raging inferno, it is still smoldering. Mr. George compared the situation to a burning coalpit, and vowed that "this operation will continue until we get all the hotspots out."