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Bovoni Landfill Fire Rages On, Increased Smoke Expected to Impact Nearby Communities

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Bovoni Landfill fire.

The fire at the Bovoni Landfill on St. Thomas [continues to burn](#) deep underground, creating challenges for firefighting personnel who have attempted to extinguish the flames for twelve consecutive days.

In an official update on Monday, VITEMA Director Daryl Jaschen explained that all involved stakeholders, including VI Fire and Emergency Medical Services, are considering “different methods of approaching and containing the debris fire.” Firefighters from St. Croix have since joined the efforts.

Smoke continues to billow from the underground fire, and according to Mr. Jaschen, is dispersing downhill. VIFEMS Assistant Director Antonio Stevens said that firefighters continue to employ excavation, dousing, separation, and suppression techniques to control the blaze, which is burning in the green waste area of the landfill. “These intensive efforts cause the burning materials to produce more smoke than what [one] might typically see,” Mr. Stevens said. Noting concerns over the presence of heavy smoke, Messrs Jaschen and Stevens stressed that the smoke was tested by the National Guard, and notwithstanding the carbonized particulate material being carried on the air, the National Guard’s tests were “negative for any harmful chemicals as the smoke is generated by the vegetation debris in the landfill.” According to Mr. Stevens, the smoke is “a testament to our relentless efforts in combating the fires.”

As firefighters continue their battle against unrelenting challenge that [last week](#) triggered a state of emergency declaration by Governor Bryan, Mr. Stevens explained the cyclical nature of the fire suppression effort. “We have established specific shift rotations for firefighters, ensuring that they are well rested and that they are best when confronting the flames.” Equipment, he says, is also regularly maintained.

With weather conditions not expected to provide any assistance in the coming days, firefighters anticipate continued challenges in extinguishing the blaze once and for all. Excavators will be used to dig out affected ridges, and firefighters will aggressively target hotspots to ensure no flames reignite, according to Mr. Stevens. In the meantime, the Department of Health will continue health assessments in areas in close proximity to the Bovoni Landfill.

D.O.H. Commissioner Justa Encarnacion described the details of these assessments, which will include inquiring about “residents general health, their exposure history and the pre-existing health conditions.” The department will also provide guidance on dealing with any possible issues caused by the smoke.

Mr. Stevens hesitated to provide an update on how far along the firefighting efforts had progressed. Instead, he emphasized that VIFEMS is working with the “ever-changing” situation.