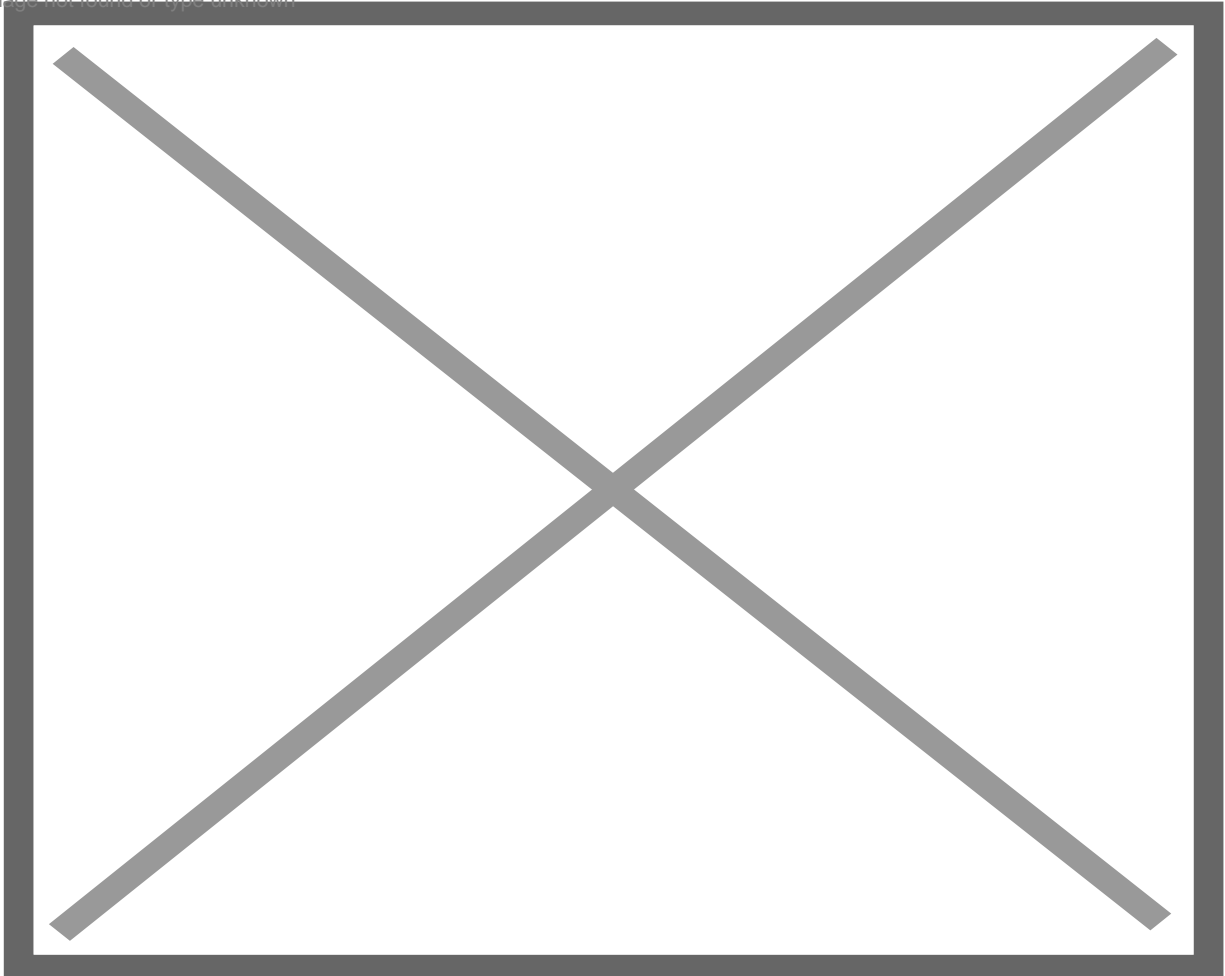


Gittens Calls for Emergency Hearing on St. Croix's Lead and Copper Water Crisis

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Senator Kenneth Gittens on Thursday announced that has written to Senate President Novelle Francis asking to convene a hearing of the Senate Committee of the Whole, ideally early next week, so that lawmakers can be fully apprised of the current water crisis on St. Croix.

“We do not know enough about this water crisis and must seek immediate answers on the record,” Mr. Gittens said.

“My colleagues have [proposed some remedies](#), however, none of us are operating with the information necessary to help formulate a comprehensive plan to address this issue,” Senator Gitten argued. “It is unclear at this point as to how many Virgin Islanders are even impacted by this contaminated water.”

On Saturday afternoon, Water and Power Authority officials announced that several samples of water, taken from various points in the St. Croix water distribution system, were tested and [found to contain](#) exceedingly high levels of lead and copper contamination. WAPA says the heavy metal contamination is limited to four communities – Diamond, Colquhoun, Castle Burke and Mon Bijou – but authorities will repeat the entire testing exercise to verify the accuracy of the initial test results.

The administration says it is awaiting the results of the second round of testing before making further decisions on how to move forward, but Sen. Gittens wants answers from everyone involved in the response: WAPA, the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, the Department of Health, the Governor’s financial team, and the US Environmental Protection Agency.

Among the information Mr. Gittens wants is how many WAPA customers are directly impacted by the water contamination issue, and how officials arrived at this figure. He also wants to know whether there are any safe or approved uses for the contaminated water, and how long it is expected to take to upgrade the St. Croix water distribution system, among other things.

“This is a serious problem, and a serious response is required,” Mr. Gittens asserted, mulling the possibility of installing portable desalination plants to serve schools and homes which lack cisterns. “There is much to be discussed.”