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State of Emergency For STX Water Contamination Would Not Provide Additional Benefits At This Time, Governor Bryan Says

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“Declaring a state of emergency will not empower the Government of the Virgin Islands to take any additional measures beyond the scope of our current response efforts.” That was the assessment of Governor Albert Bryan Jr. in a press statement issued on Monday afternoon.

The governor was addressing calls from lawmakers and members of the general public to contextualize the discovery of high levels of lead and copper contamination in some parts of the St. Croix water distribution system as an official emergency. However, Mr. Bryan said that authorities are already doing everything possible to address the alarming findings.

“Rest assured that we are treating this situation with the utmost seriousness,” Governor Bryan said. “For example, we have been monitoring bottled water prices since the start of the Atlantic Hurricane season as we do annually.” The governor also noted that local officials have been working “very closely with our federal partners who are on the ground supporting us.”

Another press statement, this time from the USVI Joint Information Center, informed that the resampling exercise begun last week had been completed. “During this past weekend, 74 samples were collected from the identified areas of concern,” said the statement. These, plus 10 samples collected earlier, have reportedly been flown to “specialized laboratories” in Puerto Rico and Florida for testing, with results at least from the first batch due at the end of the week.

“These test results are paramount,” the statement says, “as they will enable us to assess the extent of the issue and determine the appropriate course of action. The findings will also guide us in determining whether the threshold for declaring a state of emergency has been met.”

Even prior to receiving these results, however, both statements express confidence that, according to the governor, “the source of lead and copper contamination is unlikely to have originated from the water supply provided by Seven Seas to the Water and Power Authority. Instead, preliminary assessments point to the problem being within the distribution system itself, “specifically in the areas of concern identified last week – Caste Burke, Colquhoun, Diamond, and Mon Bijou.

The governor says that his team is committed to providing the public with timely updates and ensuring full transparency. “Your well-being remains our primary concern,” said Governor Bryan, as he renewed calls for patience and understanding.

Meanwhile, lawmakers continue to agitate for a hearing to be convened so that representatives from agencies involved in the response can provide information to the public via sworn testimony. Senator Diane Capeheart on Monday joined her colleagues Kenneth Gittens and Franklin Johnson in calling for a Committee of the Whole meeting. She also announced that her office has already scheduled a virtual meeting with officials from local agencies as well as the national Environmental Protection Agency “to discuss new developments regarding the contamination of the water infrastructure on St. Croix that affects the potable water distribution system.”

A press briefing to update the public on the current response efforts has been scheduled for Tuesday at 2 pm.