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'Deeply Troubled' Plaskett Points to Federal Resources for St. Croix's Water Woes

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Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett has expressed deep concerns following the recent water test results released by the V.I. Water and Power Authority. The tests, conducted on multiple sites across St. Croix, revealed extremely high levels of copper and lead in drinking water.

"I am deeply troubled by the persistent water crisis faced by Virgin Islanders on St. Croix," said Congresswoman Plaskett. She referenced significant federal resources allocated in the past two years to replace aging water infrastructure across states and territories, including the Virgin Islands. Recent grants from the Infrastructure and Jobs Act (IIJA) to the V.I. Department of Planning and Natural Resources totaled approximately \$43 million, with subawards designated to

WAPA and the V.I. Waste Management Authority. These funds aim to rectify long-standing infrastructure problems causing brown water issues on St. Croix.

Additionally, the Biden administration has earmarked over \$52 million for the territory from the Clean Water Act earlier this year, targeting infrastructure upgrades for water, wastewater, and stormwater systems. Another notable provision allows for the utilization of funds from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, with over \$500 million allocated to the Virgin Islands government. Cities across the U.S. have effectively leveraged ARPA funds for replacing lead service lines.

Plaskett also highlighted FEMA's commitment to a complete overhaul of the wastewater system on St. Croix, with a funding estimate of \$1 billion. This development followed vigorous efforts by the V.I. Office of Disaster Recovery and Ms. Plaskett's office in 2021 to correct FEMA's cost evaluation for rebuilding the territory's vital infrastructure.

Ms. Plaskett emphasized the shared responsibility in addressing the water crisis, urging residents to follow WAPA's current advisory against drinking or using water from affected areas, namely Estates Castle Burke, Colquhoun, Diamond, and Mon Bijou.

In related news, WAPA joined forces with the DPNR, the Department of Health (DOH), and VITEMA at the EPA Environmental Dialogue in Frederiksted on Tuesday. The gathering focused on a comprehensive sampling process conducted in collaboration with the University of the Virgin Islands, DPNR, and EPA. The process spanned two days, covering 16 priority locations on St. Croix with reported reddish-brown water issues. The importance of engaging with WAPA customers and addressing their concerns was underscored.

During the EPA Environmental Dialogue, DPNR detailed the sampling process and delineated the difference between lead and copper guidelines set by the EPA. WAPA said it has consistently met these guidelines, transitioning from biannual to annual to the current three-year sampling cycle. Lisa Garcia, Regional Administrator for EPA's Region 2 office, affirmed WAPA and DPNR's compliance.

Emphasizing the importance of resampling, authorities stressed its role in confirming initial results and guiding remediation efforts. Residents seeking more information on health-related inquiries can reach the Department of Health at 340-712-6299 and 340-776-1519. DPNR's hotline for sampling process details is 340-514-3666. Testing for lead exposure is available at designated health centers on St. Croix and St. Thomas.