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VI Government Seeks National Emergency Declaration From President Biden in Light of St. Croix's Water Crisis

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WAPA's Richmond Water Storage Tank By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

In the wake of elevated lead and copper levels detected in St. Croix's water supply, the VI Government is actively collaborating with federal counterparts with an aim to present a compelling case for the issuance of a presidential declaration of a national emergency. Such a declaration has the potential to enable expanded testing, afford technical assistance, and facilitate immediate relief to the island's residents, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable sections of the community.

The USVI Joint Information Center on Thursday disclosed the results of a comprehensive retest conducted on sites across the Water and Power Authority's potable water distribution system. These sites had previously shown high levels of lead and copper. The recent analysis confirms that the levels of these contaminants surpass the 15 parts per billion action level stipulated by the Environmental Protection Agency. Given these findings, the Unified Incident Command advises residents of St. Croix against consuming or ingesting the water. According to the EPA's guidelines, however, activities such as bathing, flushing toilets, laundering, and cleaning are deemed safe for residents.

Efforts to identify the root cause and full extent of the contamination are ongoing, according to Government House. Both the Department of Planning and Natural Resources and WAPA have discovered that flushing the waterlines effectively reduces the levels of lead and copper, often to undetectable levels or below the action threshold. In light of this, WAPA is executing an extensive flushing initiative, the press release states.

The [initial findings](#) came from tests conducted on September 28 and 29, a collaborative investigation between WAPA, DPNR, and the EPA to discern the cause behind the discolored water in the system.

Subsequent testing was centered on specific public facilities in the previously flagged areas, including the St. Croix Educational Complex, John H. Woodson Junior High School, Alfredo Andrews Elementary School, and the Mount Pleasant Housing Community. Water samples from these sites exhibited either undetectable levels or amounts below the 15 parts per billion action threshold, Government House said.

For residents with health concerns related to lead in drinking water and its testing, the Department of Health has established two hotlines, available from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Interested parties can reach out at 340-712-6299 or 340-776-1519. Additionally, the Department of Planning and Natural Resources has set up a hotline at 340-514-3666, operational during the same hours.

The Department of Health has also informed the public that lead exposure tests are accessible at the Clinical Laboratory Inc. located at Sunny Isle Medical Center on St. Croix, as well as the St. Thomas East End Medical Center at Tutu Park Mall on St. Thomas.