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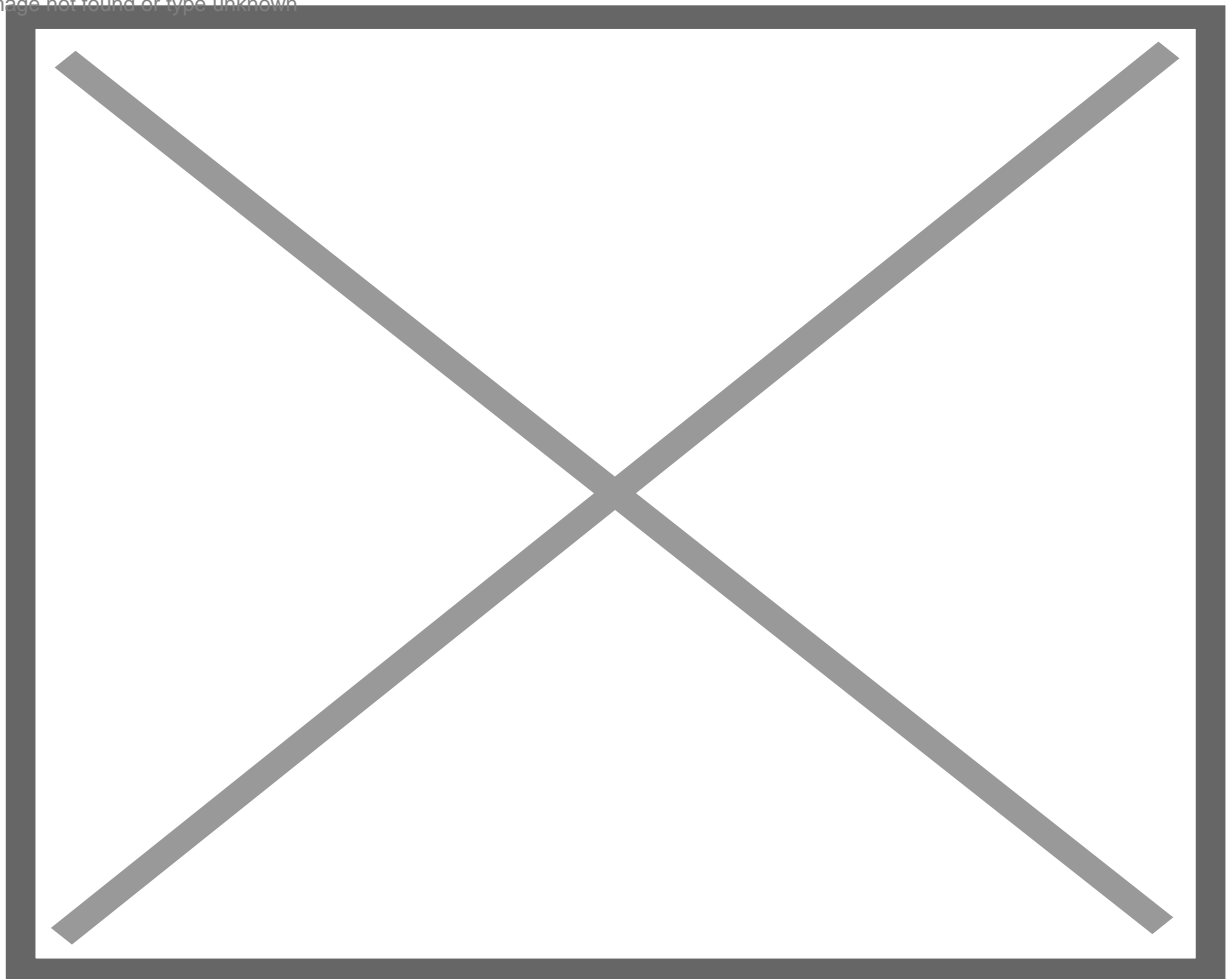
Bryan Declares State of Emergency as Nearly 4,000 Homes Affected by Lead and Copper Water; DLCA to Issue Water Price Freeze; DOH to Test Children for Contamination, WAPA CEO Apologizes

WAPA Granted \$30 Million; An Additional \$36 Million Proposed for Infrastructure Overhaul

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After many calls from lawmakers, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. on Monday afternoon declared a local state of emergency for the island of St. Croix, weeks after high levels of lead and copper were discovered in WAPA-supplied water in several communities.

The declaration follows comments made by the governor previously that a local state of emergency declaration [would not provide additional benefits](#). “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," the governor said at the time.

An estimated 3,800 homes across St. Croix continue to receive water containing elevated levels of heavy metals. That's according to the governor, who indicated that declaring a local state of emergency is the first step toward "applying for a national declaration of emergency by President Joe Biden."

In the meantime, the local declaration authorizes the governor to "access funding [and] the ability to do price freezes and the like." Price freezes were a suggestion made by Senator-at-Large Angel Bolques nearly two weeks prior, as a method to protect the vulnerable population. During Monday's press briefing, Governor Bryan authorized the commissioner of the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs to "issue a price freeze and restricted sale order to protect the consumers including drinking water, water truck haulers and water filtration products on the island of St. Croix."

The Water and Power Authority has also received directives from the governor. "I'm also calling on WAPA to take immediate action to expedite any and all actions to improve the corrosion that is contributing to the presence of brown water, lead and copper in our drinking water," said the governor. WAPA must also implement a "sustainable flushing protocol" to reduce any possible accumulation of lead or copper. The authority is already in receipt of a \$30 million grant to assess homes across the territory for the presence of heavy metal contamination. Calling it a "massive [under]taking beyond the capabilities of WAPA," Governor Byran added, "I will be making available another \$36 million of funding to begin the expedited process of replacement of WAPA service lines to the areas that have tested above EPA safe drinking water standards."

Health concerns will also be addressed under the local state of emergency. "I have also ordered the Department of Health to expand the health survey of all children zero to six years of age by performing blood tests for lead and copper," shared Byran. To date, tests show that no one has presented with elevated levels of either substance in their bodies. As a precautionary measure, the government is currently identifying vendors who can provide lead filter options to homeowners. "People keep calling us about providing water to the homes. We want to do something that's coordinated and makes sense," the governor said.

WAPA, for its part, says it continue to work with partner agencies to "collect data and devise a comprehensive strategy" to address ongoing water woes. That's according to WAPA chief executive officer Andrew Smith, who sympathized with paying consumers. "We understand that the challenges being faced are frustrating, and for that, we apologize for the inconvenience this has caused our customers."

There is no existing timeline for complete remediation of St. Croix's compromised water infrastructure and supply. "It's probably six months to several years to totally eradicate this problem," was Governor Bryan's estimation. The severity of the issue, he says, is why it is important for the national declaration of a state of emergency. If approved, it will grant the territory additional technical support and use of federal resources including "more money for water [and] the ability to access funds for health testing." The federal declaration is important for more reasons than one. "A lot of our money is tied to replacement of the system and replacements of parts. We don't have the resources to really give people free water," confessed Bryan.

"We will get through is," is his promise to residents.

