

The Virgin Islands Consortium

DPNR Commissioner Dismisses Claims That St. Croix's Water Crisis is Akin to Flint, Michigan

Jean Pierre Oriol highlights swift response and distinct differences in handling water quality issues on st. Croix compared to Flint, Michigan

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The current water emergency in St. Croix cannot be compared to the crisis in Flint, Michigan that first made global headlines nearly a decade ago, said Jean Pierre Oriol, commissioner of the V.I. Department of Planning and Natural Resources.

Mr. Oriol's comments, made during a virtual information session focused on water quality concerns on St. Croix, come after several individuals shared their beliefs that the two scenarios are in fact similar. Maria Friday, a resident of Estate Colquhoun, recently [told](#)

[lawmakers](#) that “the parallels are not just striking, but literally unsettling.”

According to Mr. Oriol, however, the comparisons to Flint are unfair, and are coming simply because “that’s the one that’s most recent in people’s minds.” He contrasted the Michigan city’s citations for violating the Drinking Water Act, issued almost 15 months “before they declared a state of emergency.” They continued to operate as though all was well, he noted, even as they were in receipt of concerning results after each of several rounds of testing. The government’s response on St. Croix, he argued, was starkly different. “We identified lead in our water in our public water system on the 13th of October, and by the 30th of October, we had already declared a state of emergency,” said Mr. Oriol.

He noted that a federal emergency declaration request has already been sent to President Biden. DPNR and the Water and Power Authority, he added, “have also been proactive in attempting to rectify this situation.” He cited ongoing efforts to identify components of the potable water systems that could be the source of the contamination. “We’ve gone already to these locations, done excavations, removed those service components, [and] tested them for lead concentration,” Mr. Oriol shared.

WAPA’s CEO Andrew Smith also dismissed claims that St. Croix could be accurately compared to Flint. “Flint, Michigan’s water issue is also a source water issue,” clarified Mr. Smith, who has repeatedly confirmed that Seven Seas Water, the producer of WAPA’s drinking water, is not the cause of the contamination. He also emphasized that the water in WAPA’s main lines is also not contaminated and that elevated levels of heavy metals have only been detected at the end of distribution lines, in areas where flow is minimal. “So that is also a very different distinction from Flint, Michigan,” he affirmed.