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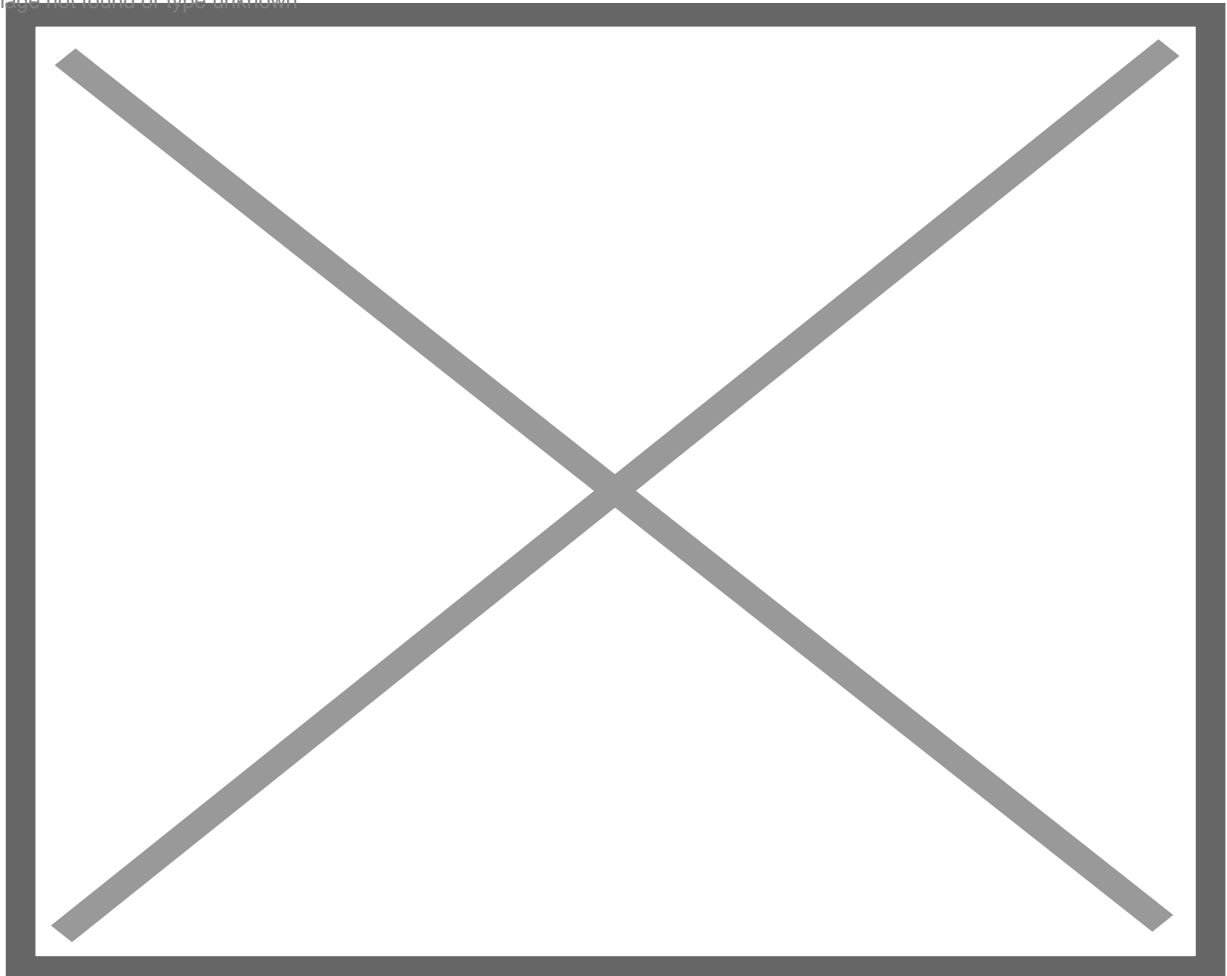
Biden Approves Federal Disaster Assistance For St. Croix Water Crisis; 1,288 Water Vouchers Distributed Over Weekend

FEMA steps in to support St. Croix amid lead, copper contamination

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**Water Distribution on St. Croix Saturday Nov. 18, 2023 at the Agricultural Fair Grounds.
By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency announced on Sunday that federal disaster assistance has been made available to the U.S. Virgin Islands to supplement the territory's response efforts due to the emergency conditions resulting from elevated levels of lead and copper in the water supply.

The federal disaster assistance was approved following Governor Albert Bryan's request, who insisted that federal support is critical for managing this crisis and ensuring long-term access to clean and safe water for the residents of St. Croix.

The president's action authorizes FEMA to coordinate all disaster relief efforts which have the purpose of alleviating the hardship and suffering caused by the emergency on the local population and to provide appropriate assistance for required emergency measures, authorized under Title V of the Stafford Act, to save lives, protect property and public health and safety, and to lessen or avert the threat of a catastrophe on the island of St. Croix, FEMA said.

Specifically, FEMA is authorized to identify, mobilize and provide, at its discretion, equipment and resources necessary to alleviate the impacts of the emergency. Emergency protective measures (Category B), including direct federal assistance, under the public assistance program will be provided for water, other necessary related items such as filters and testing and technical assistance necessary to identify and address immediate threats to public health and safety for 90 days from the start of the incident period.

Ms. Lai Sun Yee has been appointed to coordinate Federal recovery operations in the affected areas, according to FEMA.

Water Distribution on St. Croix

Meanwhile, the USVI Joint Information Center has announced the distribution of over 1200 vouchers for water to selected residents of St. Croix over the weekend.

This marks the start of the campaign to ensure that residents in communities impacted by the discovery of lead and copper contamination in the drinking water supply have access to clean, safe water.

On Saturday and Sunday, residents flocked to the Agricultural Fairgrounds, the John. H. Woodson Elementary School, and the Midre Cummings Playground, where VI National Guard troops, Water and Power Authority officials, and representatives from the VI Territorial Emergency Management Agency and other government agencies all coordinated to distribute the vouchers.

At the end of operations on Sunday, 1,288 vouchers had been handed out, while 57 additional WAPA account holders had registered but not yet picked up their allotted vouchers.

Distribution continues on Monday at the Agricultural Fairgrounds in Estate Lower Love, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The vouchers can be redeemed at The Market, Blue Mountain Water, Plaza Extra East, and both Pueblo locations.

Health concerns relating to potential lead exposure, and questions about testing, can be directed to hotlines established by the Department of Health – (340) 712-6299 or (340) 776-1519 from 8 am to 5 pm Monday through Friday.