

"Throw the Tests into the Garbage": Expert Slams St. Croix Lead and Copper Water Tests Performed by EPA

Experts challenge EPA's approach to chemical water testing in St. Croix

Health / **Published On November 23, 2023 08:08 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **November 23, 2023**

Image not found or type unknown



The Bryan administration moved swiftly to take protective action for the roughly 4,000 St. Croix households impacted by high levels of lead and copper found in potable water. From a [local state of emergency](#) declaration on Oct. 30 and providing [free bottled water](#) to the affected communities, to seeking out and receiving a federal disaster declaration, [though partial](#), from President Joseph Biden.

However, questions are emerging about whether an actual lead and copper water crisis exists on St. Croix. The Associated Press said in an [article](#) published Wednesday, that it contacted water experts who rubbished the results that showed extremely high levels of lead and copper in the

island's water system.

“The data should be thrown into the garbage,” Virginia Tech water expert Marc Edwards, who helped identify the water problems in Flint, Michigan, told the AP.

Mr. Edwards expressed skepticism about the exceedingly high results, attributing the discrepancy to the method of sample collection. Typically, lead testing involves taking water samples from a household faucet. However, the notably high readings on St. Croix were obtained from samples collected at the water meter, not from household faucets.

“When you (unscrew) it, you are literally ripping the leaded-brass apart and a chunk of leaded-brass gets in your sample,” Mr. Edwards said, according to the AP. This method leads to results that are artificially elevated.

Another expert, Tom Neltner of the Environmental Defense Fund, whom the AP consulted, concurred with Mr. Edwards that testing from the meter yields inaccurate results. “There’s a lot of oddities,” the chemical and lead expert said, referring to how the St. Croix water sampling was conducted.

The tests, conducted by the Environmental Protection Agency on Sept. 30th, returned on Oct. 13th showing extremely high levels of the neurotoxin. Lead exposure is particularly harmful to children due to their developing bodies and nervous systems. The damage it can cause is extensive and often irreversible.

After the local state of emergency was declared, the V.I. Department of Health initiated a comprehensive lead testing program focused on children, which has so far [yielded no positive cases](#).

Yet regardless of whether a crisis truly exists, St. Croix's water system needs to be replaced, an assessment agreed upon by all stakeholders.

For well over a decade, residents of St. Croix have complained about the well-documented brown water crisis. Some of those impacted finally got their chance to speak on an official platform [during a recent Senate Committee of the Whole hearing](#), where WAPA, DPNR and other relevant government entities were questioned.

Maria Friday, a resident of Estate Colquhoun, holding a heavily stained filter conveyed the fears of her community. “Our residents in Colquhoun are ensnared in a web of anxiety,” she said. “Every time they turn on the tap, they are faced with potential harm; harm in drinking, harm in cooking...such rudimentary activities now carry the risk of lead-induced cognitive impairment in children and severe health implications in adults.”

According to Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, 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.

The Bryan administration is expected to provide an important update to the community regarding the lead and water crisis on Friday.

© Viconsortium 2025