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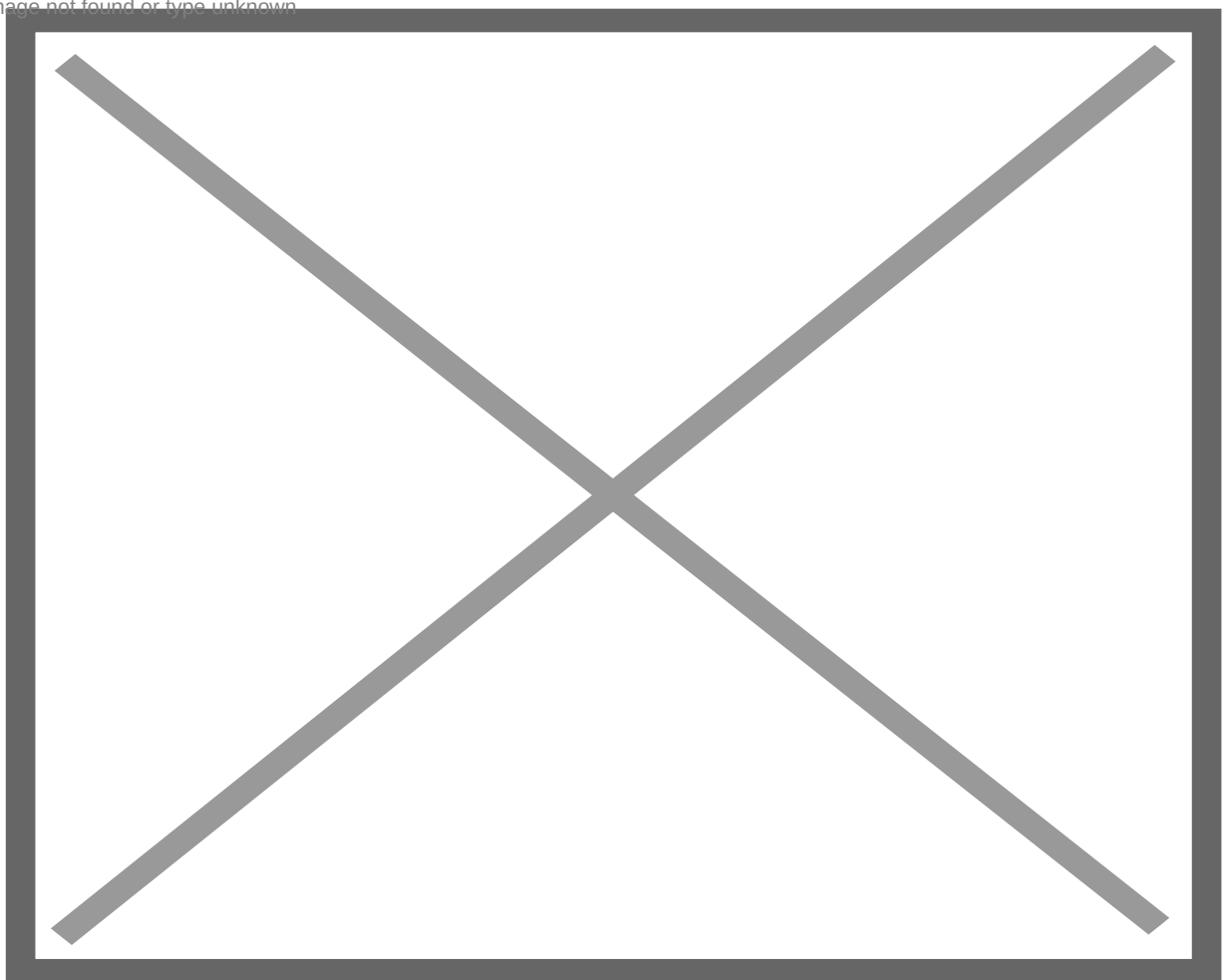
Unless Local Leaders Drink Brown Water on Camera, Matter Remains a Crisis That Must Be Addressed, VIHA Says

Drinking brown water for public to see becomes litmus test for resolving water quality issues

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Nelcia Charlemagne **November 30, 2023**

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WAPA's brown, undrinkable water crisis on St. Croix has persisted for years.

The V.I. Housing Authority's executive director, in a striking display of skepticism towards the handling of the water quality crisis in the Virgin Islands, said until local leaders are willing to consume the brown water coming from the faucets of homes across the territory, the matter remains a crisis and should not be considered resolved.

“Unless someone from the Command Center, or the governor, or the WAPA CEO is willing to drink the brown water on camera, it is not resolved in the minds of residents,” VIHA chief Robert Graham said during a VIHA board meeting Wednesday. He said the Unified Command Center needs to take the [years-long water discoloration issue](#) as seriously as it did the discovery of potential lead and copper contamination in the potable water distribution system on St. Croix.

“Even if you do the testing and there’s not as much of an emergency as initially thought, the issue of the brown water will continue,” Mr. Graham told fellow board members, alluding to recent reports that the claims of heavy metal contamination may be “unfounded” due to [deviations from approved testing protocols](#).

As an entity, Mr. Graham says VIHA has been calling for the Command Center to ensure that it distinguishes, for the benefit of the public, between water that may be tainted with lead and copper versus the discolored water that has been attributed to corrosion (rust) in metal pipes. He acknowledged that a complete replacement of St. Croix’s water line infrastructure is in the works, and vowed to “share that information as it becomes available.”

VIHA Chief Operating Officer Lydia Pelle informed board members that residents in housing communities located in the areas presumed to be affected by heavy metals in the water have been receiving the promised water vouchers to ensure access to a safe supply of drinking water. Inhabitants of the Aureo Diaz Heights, Candido Guadeloupe Terrace, Williams Delight, Louis E. Brown, and the Walter I.M. Hodge Pavilion are being supplied with the vouchers, said Mr. Pelle, and VIHA was working “to ensure that they have the opportunity to have the same water that’s being distributed to the general public.”

Earlier this week, Government House Communications Director Richard Motta indicated that [water voucher distribution](#) on St. Croix would continue.