

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Bryan Announces Final Round of Water Testing for Lead and Copper in St. Croix

Residents urged to volunteer homes for crucial testing amid water quality concerns

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Governor Albert Bryan Jr. announced this week that the Water and Power Authority and its local and federal partners are now seeking approximately 80 homes on St. Croix to conduct the final round of testing for lead and copper contamination in the water.

Despite previous results that indicated that the initial elevated levels of heavy metal detected were likely due to poor sampling protocols or anomalies in the system, Governor Bryan said that nevertheless, authorities were proceeding with the utmost

caution. "We still want to make sure that everyone remains safe," he told residents, indicating that further testing of 100 sites would be conducted. Twenty of those sites were already identified, said the governor, however "they need to find another 80 or so homes in order to have places to sample. So here's a free chance to get your water sampled," he told St. Croix residents.

"If you're on potable water, you're using a WAPA system, we need you to just call in to WAPA and make sure you volunteer," Mr. Bryan urged, particularly "if you're [in] one of those affected areas."

Should this newest round of testing return results that are either not detectable or "way below the EPA action level" for lead and copper, Governor Bryan says that the current state of emergency on St. Croix will not be extended. "That's not to say that we're not attacking it like an emergency, we're just removing the power of the governor to access funds because we think we have the funding in place," he noted.

Plans were still underway to provide filtration systems, Mr. Bryan promised, and authorities were committed to following through "with all our efforts to address the corroding lines and the rust-tainted water that we have been experiencing."

Careful to reiterate that the rust-induced water discoloration is a completely separate issue from the potential heavy metal contamination, the governor said that he expects St. Croix's "brown water" problem to begin to clear in five to six months. "But still, after that, we're going to be cleaning out those pipes and redoing the entire water system of St. Croix. So upgrading and using the corrosion control system, and ultimately replacing the iron pipes is our action plan for us," the territory's leader announced.

Returning to the issue of potential lead contamination in residents' water, Mr. Bryan noted that some households were fitted with plumbing that contains lead components. He referred to recently-vetoed legislation that would have mandated widespread testing for lead, asking senators to revisit the language of the bill to "define what you mean by private water system." Nevertheless, he encouraged homeowners to have their water tested, whether they are supplied by a cistern or the municipal water supply.

Governor Bryan also promised that St. Croix residents who have been advised to flush their water lines for several minutes before using their potable water supply will receive credits to offset that water use. "I think the credit is \$25 per month per bill we'll be issued that for three months," the governor advised.