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Christiansted Business Owners Left Frustrated after Receiving \$1,000 Fine for Violating a Trash Law, Allegedly Without Warning

Despite the economic downturn from street closures, Christiansted businesses are now being fined for using public bins for their waste, a practice many did not know was illegal

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The Peter's Rest Convenience Center, which sign reads, "No Commercial Waste Accepted." By. TSEHAI ALFRED

After [a slow year for small businesses](#) in Christiansted town due to road closures and repairs, business owners say their economic stress has been compounded from receiving citations and fines for disposing of their business waste in public receptacles, ostensibly violating a law they

say they were never aware of.

VI Code Title 19, subsection 1563, which mandates that businesses throw their waste at the Anguilla Landfill or have a business trash hauler, was created in 2019. However, it was not until Thursday that V.I. Waste Management Authority enforcement officers confronted business owners about how they dispose of their waste. Although the director of enforcement for WMA, Anderson Poleon, said all Christiansted town businesses were invited to a town hall meeting last year, where they were informed to comply with the new trash law, Christiansted business owners said only three businesses attended, leaving many to be surprised when Waste Management officers said they were in violation of the law and levied the businesses with fines of \$1,000.

“I was upset because she was insinuating that I'm breaking the law. I've had my business for 30 years. I don't break laws,” Jan Mitchell of Mitchell Larsen Studio said. On Thursday, Mitchell was approached by a Waste Management enforcement officer who insisted that she could not dispose of her trash at the public trash bin across the street. Although Mitchell explained that she only throws small paper waste at public trash bins, while her husband throws the business' larger trash at the Anguilla landfill, the enforcement officer nevertheless told her she was in violation of the law.

“I explained to her that that's all well and good if someone at some point had told us or sent an email, or anything to say that businesses were not allowed to use it. There's no sign. There's nothing,” Mitchell said.

Lisa Bhola, owner of Trends Boutique, was also given a citation and fine for disposing of her waste at the Peter's Rest Convenience Center, despite explaining to the enforcement officer that she had not been aware of the law.

“It's been a really hard year with all the closures of the streets and all the work being done, probably one of the toughest I've had, including after two cat five [hurricanes] and the pandemic and all the closures. So to now not even give me a warning and allow me to fix what you say is a rule— don't even give me proper information so I know it's this statute that says this—it was really frustrating. I feel like we're really targeted,” Bhola said, echoing Mitchell's sentiment.

According to Mr. Poleon, VIWMA inspectors contacted Christiansted business owners last year, informing them to acquire a waste hauler's permit. “Some of them got permits. Some still did not, and this is now the result,” he said.

For Maria Banwaree, owner of Unique by Maria Banwaree Art Studio and Boutique, the encounter with the enforcement officer felt like a provocation and left her feeling afraid for her safety.

“Literally I had to take a moment after and cry and release my energy out of my head because how can somebody just arrive to a business saying that she has proof of me throwing garbage in a public place?”

The enforcement officer approached Banwaree with proof that she had been throwing her business waste in public receptacles— a picture of a business receipt from Banwaree's establishment in a plastic bag in a public trash bin near the Christiansted Post Office. Despite Banwaree telling the officer that the receipt was not hers, the enforcement officer told her she would have to sign the citation or risk arrest. Banwaree said she felt pushed and signed the citation.

“This girl messed up my head so much that in the night, when I have to close my shop, and pick up my garbage from my studio—that is a 13-Gallon trash bag—I put it in my car and I don't know what to do with it,” Banwaree said, explaining that the officer told her that she would be faced with another fine if she saw the business owner throwing her garbage in a public receptacle on camera footage.

For the small businesses who signed the citation, \$1,000 is a large ask. “I don't have \$1,000,” Mitchell said. Additionally, many of the businesses argue that the trash law is inconvenient as the establishments only produce around one bag of trash a week and a drive to the Anguilla Landfill would not only cost gas money but a \$20 fee for disposing of business waste.

After the encounter with the enforcement officer, Mitchell's husband decided to comply with the law, driving to the Anguilla Landfill and paying \$20 to dispose of a small bag of paper waste. Mitchell, as well as the other businesses who signed the citation, received a July court date where they will have the opportunity to discuss the citation in front of a judge. “They gave me a date to be at court and I will be there because I don't feel that I've done anything wrong,” Mitchell said.