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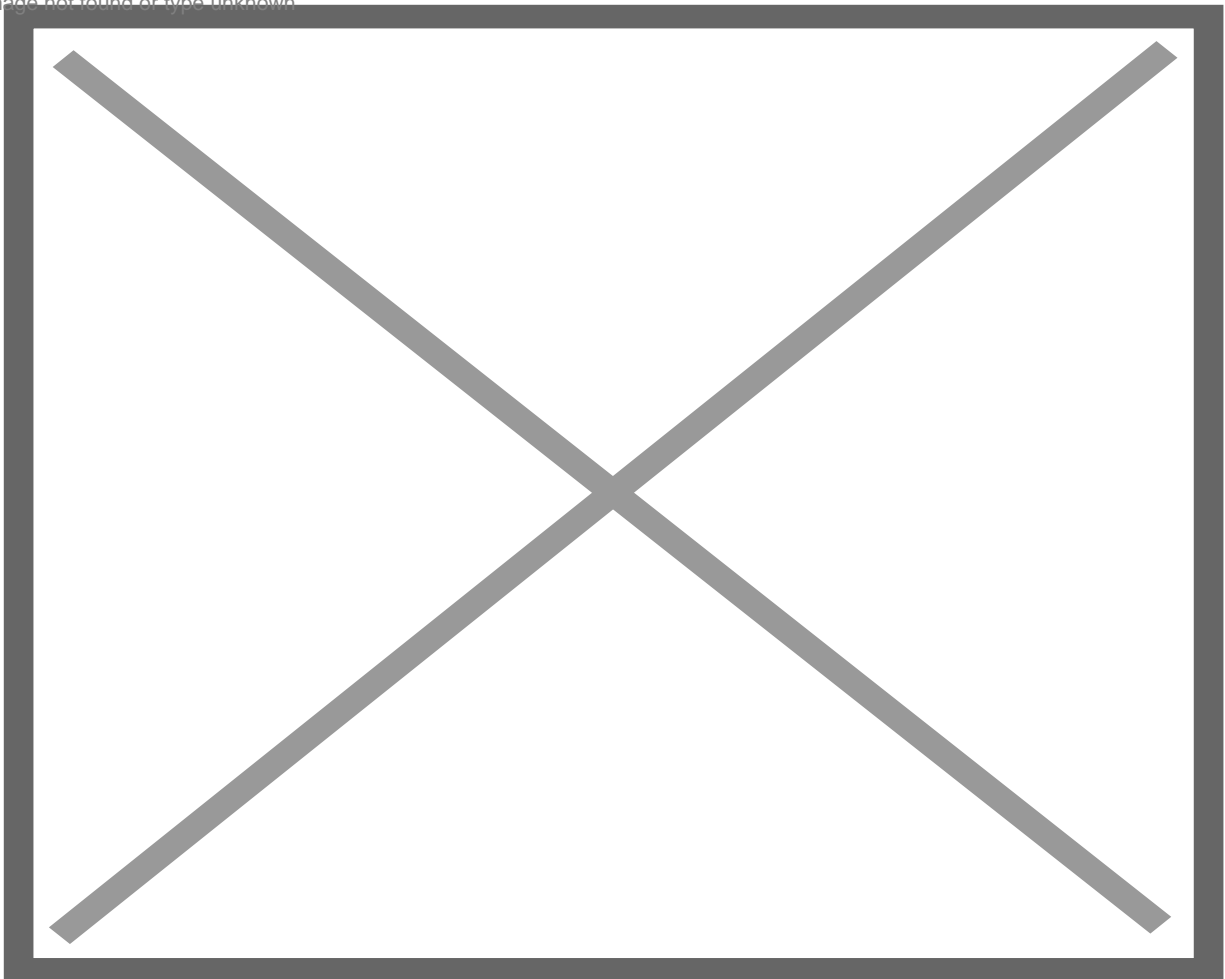
Amid Ongoing Hurricane Season, USVI Leans Towards Air Burning for Green Waste Management

Facing the challenge of managing hundreds of thousands of cubic yards of green waste, the USVI explores air curtain burning as a viable and environmentally safer alternative

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An air burner being utilized By. GETTY IMAGES

The government of the Virgin Islands must now consider new options for managing green waste, as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers indicated to local authorities just over a year ago that it would no longer be transporting vegetative debris out of the territory.?

Daryl Jaschen, director of the V.I. Territorial Management Agency, told lawmakers on Wednesday that “Governor Bryan will need to identify the best option of addressing 100,000s of

cubic yards of green waste which will be generated as a result of a hurricane impact to the territory.”

A series of factors prompted the ban on exporting green waste, he testified during a hearing of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety. “No one wants that waste. No one's going to pay for that waste. The transport for that waste is extraordinary,” Mr. Jaschen revealed. As the territory braces for what forecasters are predicting will be an above-average Atlantic Hurricane Season, pinning down a solution needs to happen soon.

Talk of incinerating green waste currently stored at the landfills managed by the Waste Management Authority has been met with [significant opposition](#) by local environmentalists. The “demonstration” burn is a request by the Federal Emergency Management Agency as a means of reducing the amount of accumulated green waste. In late 2023, an underground fire in the green waste section of the Bovoni landfill [burned for weeks](#), releasing fumes into neighboring communities, disrupting school schedules and triggering a [state of emergency declaration](#).

Now, lawmakers including Senator Franklin Johnson have asked Mr. Jaschen what “plan [is] in place for green waste as we speak?” It seems that there is no clear answer. As Mr. Jaschen explained, the Department of Public Works is collaborating with WMA to “reduce” the amount of green waste. “Most likely it's going to be through composting, which is a great option, but very limited in the time it takes to do that.”

It’s not a response that satisfied Mr. Johnson. “We need to start out with where will we be storing it before we start discussing compost,” he argued. Part of ongoing work to prepare the islands for possible storm impact includes pruning trees and clearing vegetative debris from drains. Mr. Johnson was concerned with where the additional green waste generated from this new work would be stored as the government considers the best option for disposal.

The plan, said Mr. Jaschen, is for WMA to identify and prepare “temporary debris sites” in each district. In St. Croix, the authority has earmarked several possible locations including within the Anguilla Landfill. Mr. Johnson was skeptical, observing that the St. Croix landfill was “over bulk with waste.” “We need to really be serious about this and start finding a place to hold this waste. We're going to have a problem,” he said.

Senator Milton Potter, too, tried to probe further. He wondered whether composting was a “realistic solution.” It’s something that Mr. Jaschen said. “farmers would love to work for.” In the meantime, authorities seem prepared to move forward with the “air curtain burn” that involves separating any oils and metals present in the accumulated green waste before burning it down to ash. It is possible to burn 7-10 tons at once through that process, Mr. Jaschen said. “It's all supposed to be very environmentally safe compared to just open burning,” he noted.?

With memories of the Bovoni landfill fire still fresh in the minds of Virgin Islanders, Mr. Potter spoke for all lawmakers when he urged the authorities to act urgently to find a “viable solution” to the green waste issue.