

Image not found or type unknown

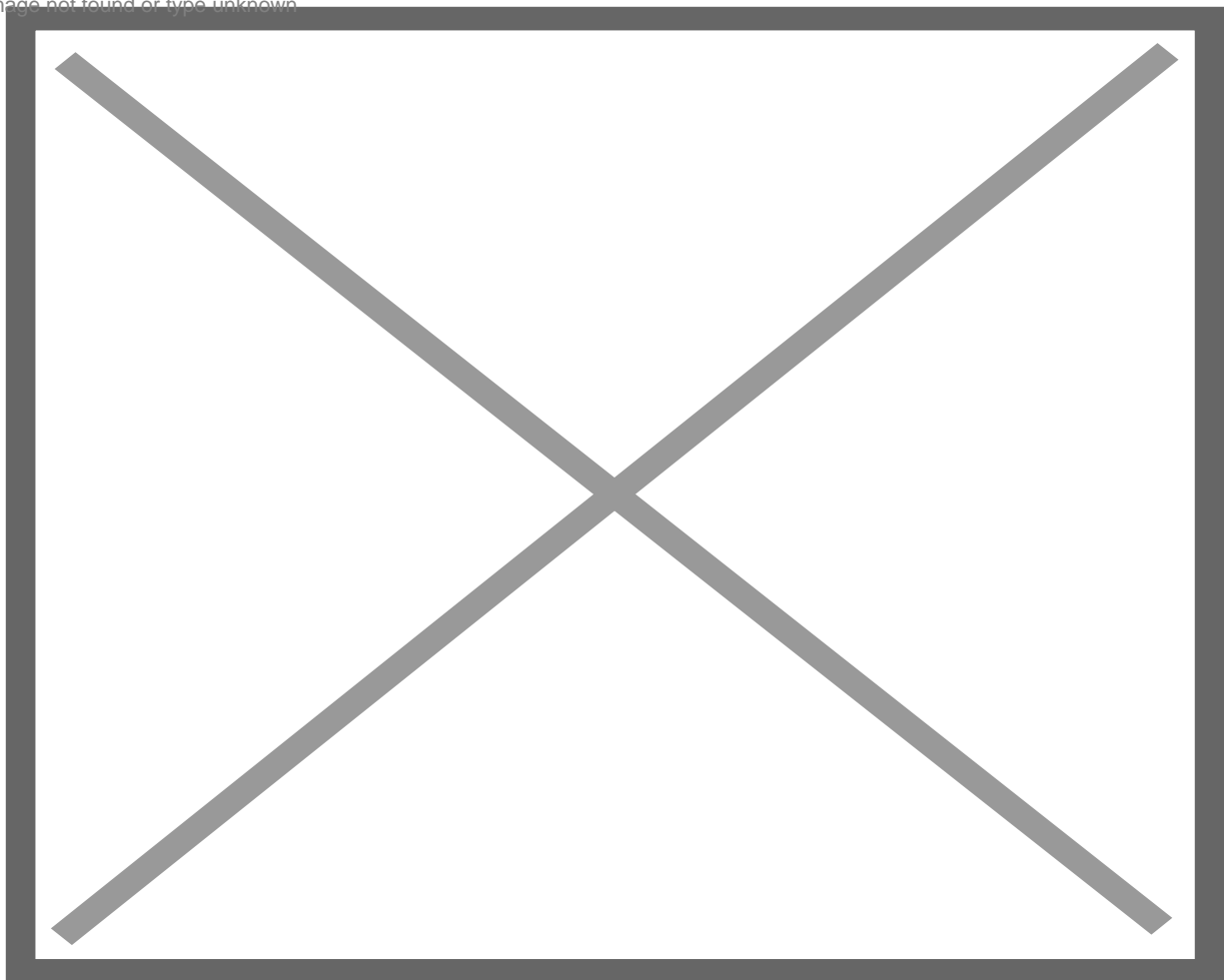
Terra Ay Ay Project Launches Free Air, Water, and Soil Testing for St. Croix Communities

Residents in mid-island and western regions urged to participate in data collection aimed at monitoring industrial pollution and protecting public health

Environment / **Published On September 06, 2024 06:28 AM /**

Staff Consortium **September 06, 2024**

Image not found or type unknown



The Terra Ay Ay Project is calling on residents and farmers in the mid-island and western regions of St. Croix to volunteer for free air, water, and soil testing. The initiative, led by local nonprofits and supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, aims to collect community-sourced environmental data to monitor the island's air, water, and soil quality.

Homeowners, farmers, and backyard growers in specific neighborhoods, including Adventure, Golden Grove, Mt. Pleasant, and Sion Hill, are encouraged to participate by allowing air sensors to be installed at their homes or by signing up for cistern water, well water, and soil testing. The

testing is targeted to areas that have experienced adverse environmental impacts in recent years, particularly in the wake of industrial pollution and other environmental disasters.

Franelle Gerard, executive director of Crucian Heritage and Nature Tourism (CHANT), emphasized the importance of monitoring environmental conditions in St. Croix, given the island's history of natural and man-made disasters. "From Category 5 hurricanes, flash floods, and Sahara dust, to industrial pollution and oil spills, all of these factors affect our health," Gerard said. "Now with Terra Ay Ay, we can collect our own data to monitor these impacts."

The project, which follows a citizen-science model, is training students, teachers, and volunteers to install a network of 15 PurpleAir sensors across the island and conduct over 100 residential water and soil tests. The data collected will be made available to the public through the Terra Ay Ay website, providing an unbiased and scientific resource for residents to make informed decisions about their health and environment.

The program's educational component aims to inspire the next generation of environmental stewards. Jen Valiulis, Executive Director of the St. Croix Environmental Association (SEA), said, "Citizen science projects are at the heart of what we do at SEA, and we are excited to bring this project into classrooms to engage young students and college students." Valiulis hopes the project will spark interest in environmental science careers and empower students and community members to become stewards of St. Croix.

The Virgin Islands Good Food Coalition, another project partner, views the data collection as a critical tool in holding policymakers accountable. Sommer Sibilly-Brown, Executive Director of the organization, noted, "When we talk about quality of life in the VI, we need to ensure our community has access to real-time information on the factors affecting our quality of life. With our own data in hand, we can hold our elected officials accountable."

The Terra Ay Ay Project, funded by an EPA grant, was created in response to the environmental pollution and incidents at the St. Croix refinery in 2021. Collaborating with local and federal partners, the project continues to gather data to monitor the long-term impacts of environmental hazards on public health.

Residents in the target areas can email terraayay@gmail.com or call 340-727-6597 to sign up for free testing. The data collected will be published online at terra-ayay-project.org, providing a trusted resource for the community.

For more information, including real-time air quality data from PurpleAir sensors already installed on St. Croix, visit the Terra Ay Ay website.