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Sea Turtle Rescued Near Frederiksted Pier After Spearfishing Injury

A green sea turtle rescued near Frederiksted Pier after being speared in the neck highlights fishing-related threats in the USVI, as STAR urges responsible practices, quick reporting, and public cooperation to protect the federally protected species.

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STAR team members work to rescue a green sea turtle near Frederiksted Pier after removing a fishing spear from its neck.

A green sea turtle found near the Frederiksted Pier in St. Croix with a fishing spear lodged through its neck was rescued and released on August 4, thanks to a coordinated effort by the Sea Turtle Assistance and Rescue (STAR) team and local partners.

According to a releaser from STAR, the rescue began when divers contacted STAR's sea turtle stranding hotline, sending photos of the injured turtle. Responders quickly located and secured the animal, carefully removing the spear. On-site treatment addressed the wound, which showed no signs of permanent damage. After ensuring the turtle was no longer bleeding and had resumed normal behavior, the team returned it to the water.

Green sea turtles are listed as Threatened under federal law, facing both human and natural pressures. In the U.S. Virgin Islands, they share nesting grounds with hawksbills and leatherbacks, coming ashore between June and November, while foraging year-round on coastal seagrass beds.

So far in 2025, five sea turtle strandings in the territory have been linked to fishing activities. Strandings involve turtles that are found dead, injured, or in distress, and in fishing-related cases may include entanglement in discarded line, hook-and-line injuries, net captures, or harm from spearfishing, according to the release. STAR warns that misuse of fishing gear can cause serious injury or death to these protected animals.

STAR urges fishers to act immediately if a turtle is accidentally caught or injured. There is no penalty for reporting, and rapid response can save a turtle's life. To reduce risks, the group advises proper disposal of fishing gear and never leaving gear unattended. Sea turtles in the USVI are protected under the Endangered Species Act, making it illegal to harm, harass, or injure them. Violations carry significant fines and can include jail time.

A collaboration of government agencies, non-profits, veterinarians, and volunteers, STAR responds to turtle strandings across St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John. Reports can be made by calling 340-690-0474, with details on location, turtle condition, size, and visible injuries. More information on conservation efforts can be found at stxturtles.com/sea-turtle-rescue or via STAR's social media pages.

STAR expressed gratitude to the divers, snorkelers, and organizations who played a role in the rescue, including USFWS, DPNR, St. Croix Sea Turtle Project, St. Croix Ultimate Blue Diver Adventures, Nep2une Scuba, Virgin Islands Port Authority, and Vivot Equipment Corporation. The group said the successful rescue would not have been possible without their cooperation.