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Woman Dies After Shark Attack at Dorsch Beach on St. Croix

A woman died Thursday after being attacked by a shark at Dorsch Beach on St. Croix, where emergency crews responded to reports of severe injuries. An eyewitness said the victim was pulled from the water with catastrophic trauma and transported to JFL.

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People at Dorsch Beach in Frederiksted following a fatal shark attack. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM.

ST. CROIX — A woman died Thursday afternoon after suffering catastrophic injuries in a shark attack at Dorsch Beach on St. Croix, authorities and an eyewitness confirmed, as emergency crews and bystanders rushed to render aid in the moments following the incident.

The St. Croix 911 Emergency Communications Center said it received multiple calls at approximately 4:28 p.m. reporting that a female had been bitten by a shark at Dorsch Beach. Marine units, along with Fire and Emergency Medical Services, were immediately dispatched to the scene.

Fire officials confirmed that the woman's arm had been completely severed as a result of the attack. She was transported for emergency medical treatment, but later succumbed to her injuries at the Juan F. Luis Hospital, according to V.I. Director of Communications Glen Dratte, who was on the scene and confirmed the development to The Virgin Islands Consortium.

Additional details about the moments immediately after the attack were provided by Christopher Carroll, a nurse who was staying nearby and entered the water in an attempt to help the victim. Carroll said the incident unfolded quickly and drew immediate attention from people on the beach.

Carroll said he was in his hotel room at Sand Castles on the Beach in Frederiksted when he heard screaming coming from the shoreline. He ran downstairs to assess the situation, believing someone might need medical assistance. From the beach, he said, people were pointing toward a woman in distress in the water.

Carroll, who said he had previously worked as a lifeguard, swam out to reach the woman. Once he got to her, he observed a large amount of blood in the water and realized she had been the victim of a shark attack. He took hold of her and began towing her back toward shore.

As he brought her closer, Carroll said the extent of her injuries became clear. He stated that her left arm was gone from the elbow down, with only the upper bone and shoulder remaining, and that she appeared extremely pale with blue lips. Carroll said the woman told him her name was Arlene, and he reassured her as he continued swimming her back to the beach.

After reaching shore, Carroll said several bystanders helped lift the woman out of the water. They elevated her legs and attempted to provide medical assistance until emergency responders arrived. He said St. Croix paramedics and EMTs responded quickly, placed her on a backboard, and transported her by ambulance.

Despite those efforts, Carroll said he was later informed that the woman did not survive. She has been identified as Arlene Lillis, 56, of Detroit Lakes, Minnesota. Authorities said she was identified by her husband, Richard Lillis.

Senator Kenneth Gittens also issued a statement following the incident, expressing condolences to the victim's family and highlighting broader concerns raised by the tragedy. "It is sad and shocking to hear of the apparent shark attack involving a female swimmer near the buoy at Dorsch Beach in Frederiksted. My heart goes out to her and her family, and I thank the courageous citizen(s) who assisted her to shore and the emergency first responders for their swift action. This incident underscores the urgent need to strengthen our hospitals and make rebuilding them a top priority this year."