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## Fatal Dorsch Beach Injury Confirmed as Shark Attack as Officials Stress Ocean Is a 'Wild Environment'

Territorial officials confirmed a shark caused the fatal injury to Minnesota visitor Arlene Lillis at Dorsch Beach, with investigations ongoing as agencies recover personal items, coordinate public safety messaging, and plan a shark awareness campaign.

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A St. Croix Rescue vehicle at Dorsch Beach during response operations, where personnel later recovered personal items belonging to shark attack victim Arlene Lillis from the water and returned them to her family. By. V.I.CONSORTIUM.

The V.I. Department of Planning and Natural Resources has formally confirmed that the injury sustained by Arlene Lillis while swimming at Dorsch Beach was caused by a shark. The species of

shark, however, is unknown.

Ms. Lillis, who is from Minnesota, was a “frequent visitor to our beautiful islands,” per Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach. She succumbed to her injuries at the Juan F. Luis Hospital. Gov. Albert Bryan Jr. is traveling to Nassau, Bahamas to participate in Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.’s 17th Biennial National Founders’ Day Celebration and associated Leadership Summit events, and was not present at today’s press briefing.

Investigations into [Thursday’s fatal shark attack](#) are ongoing, according to Daryl Jaschen, director of the V.I. Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA). Thursday’s emergency response at Dorsch Beach was a coordinated effort with support from the V.I. Police Department, the V.I. Fire and Emergency Medical Services, St. Croix Rescue, DPNR, and the US Coast Guard. Team members, Mr. Jaschen said, “acted swiftly and professionally under very extreme and difficult circumstances.”

Unfortunately, their best efforts and the lifesaving interventions from the public, could not save Ms. Lillis’ life.

VITEMA has promised to share “verified” updates with the public as investigations continue, noting that “unverified information spread quickly” in situations like these.

Personal items belonging to Ms. Lillis were recovered in the water off Dorsch Beach by St. Croix Rescue, and have been returned to her family. Discovering the items was “a way for us to bring peace to the family,” Jason Henry of St. Croix Rescue said.

Condolences for Ms. Lillis’s family have been shared across the length and breadth of the Virgin Islands. Speaking at Friday’s press conference, Lieutenant Governor Roach stated that “our immediate concern was for the family of the victim of this attack.”

With investigations ongoing by the territory’s team of emergency response agencies, the Government of the Virgin Islands is simultaneously focused on maintaining safety on local beaches.

“We are surrounded by water, we do not control the sea, but we can be careful and we can be safe if we adhere to the information provided by the Department of Planning and Natural Resources about safety and the sea,” Lieutenant Governor Roach said.

Nicole Angeli, director of DNPR’s Division of Fish and Wildlife, confirmed the shark attack and concurred that “this heartbreaking incident has shaken our entire community.” According to Ms. Angeli, encounters with sharks are “common” but “encounters that result in a bite are very rare.”

While encouraging locals and visitors to enjoy the territory’s beaches, Ms. Angeli reminded the public that the ocean is a “wild environment” and that due caution is necessary.

DPNR and the V.I. Department of Tourism are set to collaborate on a sensitization campaign, providing critical information on how to respond in the event of an encounter with a shark.