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Water Spirit Docking Restriction in San Juan Raises Cargo Disruption Concerns for USVI Residents and Businesses

Water Spirit's San Juan-to-USVI cargo routes move goods including refrigerated cargo, produce, vehicles, construction materials, appliances and heavy equipment; the restriction could create delays for residents and businesses that rely on the carrier.

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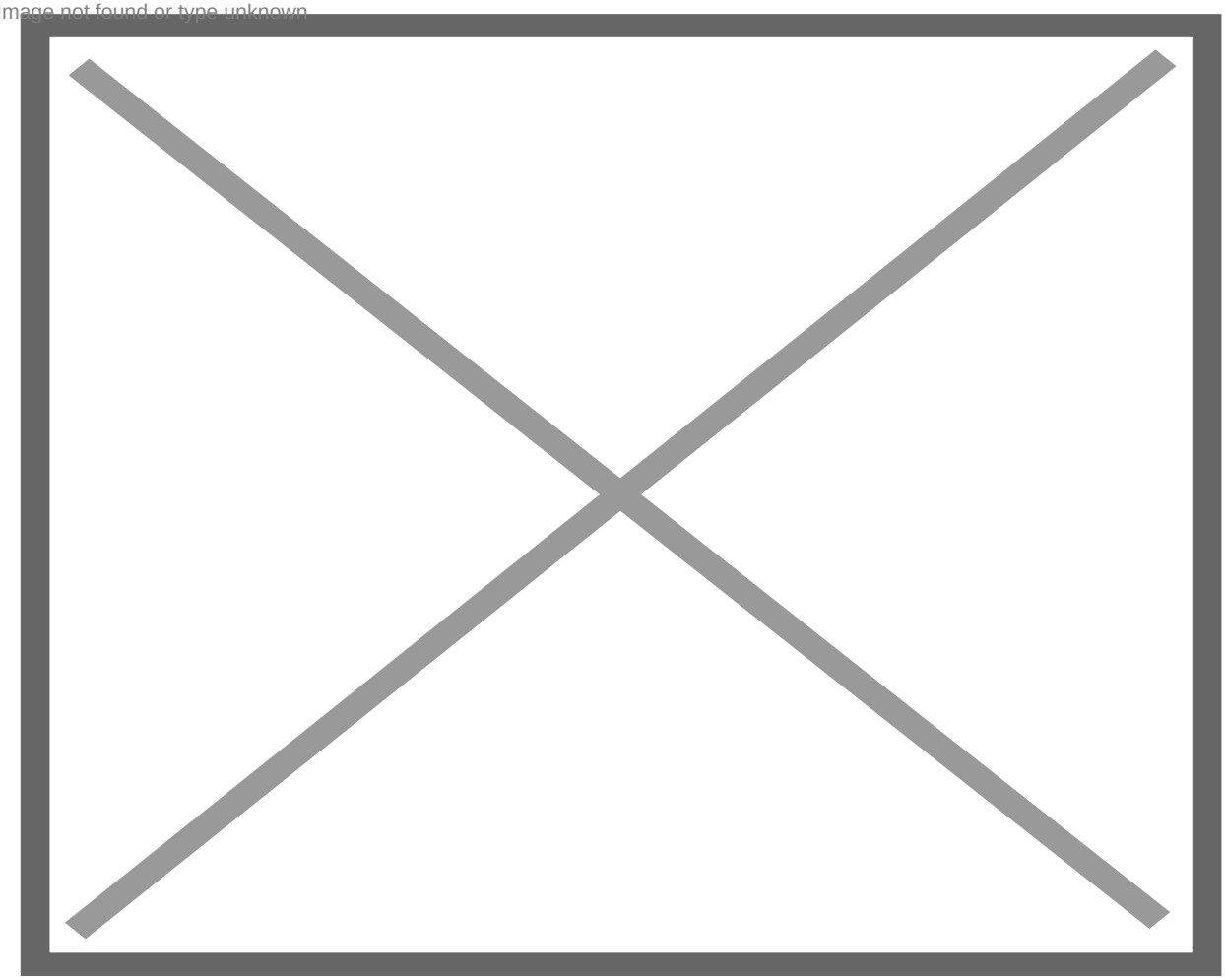

The V.I. Port Authority is responding to community concerns after being notified that the vessel operated by Water Spirit Freight Services VI, Inc. has been restricted from docking in San Juan, Puerto Rico, creating potential disruption for cargo service relied upon by residents and businesses in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

VIPA said the matter is specific to the Port of San Juan and falls outside of the authority's jurisdiction. The V.I. Port Authority has no regulatory authority over Puerto Rico's harbor operations, docking rules, or enforcement decisions made by the U.S. Coast Guard or the Puerto Rico Ports Authority. The agency said it will continue to share any relevant information that may assist the community.

The U.S. Coast Guard announced on May 9 that Captain of the Port Orders had been issued to two Togo-flagged multipurpose offshore vessels — Water Spirit 2 and Admiral Pride — after the agency said the vessels obstructed the navigable San Antonio Channel while moored at Pier 10 in San Juan Harbor on May 1. Under the order, both vessels will not be cleared to re-enter San Juan Harbor until they demonstrate to the Coast Guard that they can moor in accordance with industry standards without affecting safe navigation in the harbor.

The Coast Guard said the San Antonio Channel is one of the busiest waterways in the Eastern Caribbean, measuring about 1.2 miles long and roughly 300 to 500 feet wide. The agency also noted that some of the world's largest cruise ships call on San Juan and frequently moor across from the area where Water Spirit 2 and Admiral Pride had used a Mediterranean mooring configuration. The Coast Guard stated that Mediterranean mooring is permitted only when no part of the vessel or its anchors encroaches on navigable channels.

Water Spirit Freight Services describes itself as a family-owned cargo company founded in 2005, providing freight service among San Juan, St. Croix, St. Thomas and Tortola. Its published route schedule lists twice-weekly service from San Juan to St. Croix with a one-day transit time, twice-weekly service from San Juan to St. Thomas with a two-day transit time, and weekly service from San Juan to Tortola with a three-day transit time. The company also lists inter-island routes between St. Croix, St. Thomas and Tortola.

The potential impact is significant because Water Spirit handles a broad range of cargo categories. Its website lists dry goods, refrigerated cargo, produce, vehicles, RVs, boats, heavy equipment, appliances, furniture, construction material and fragile goods among the items it transports. The company also states that vehicles, boats, heavy equipment, containers and large merchandise must be booked in advance because of space and availability limitations.

For residents and businesses, the disruption could mean delayed shipments, postponed pickups, tighter booking space, and the need to find alternative carriers for cargo moving out of San Juan. Businesses that depend on regularly scheduled freight from Puerto Rico — including those moving produce, refrigerated goods, appliances, furniture, construction materials and equipment — may be forced to adjust timelines or incur additional costs if cargo must be rerouted. No official estimate of total cargo volume affected was immediately available.

The situation also raises concern because the Virgin Islands remains heavily dependent on imported goods. In an April 2025 statement on maritime policy, Government House said more than 95 percent of all goods consumed in the territory are imported, including food, medicine and construction supplies. That dependence means disruptions to even one cargo carrier can ripple through households, retailers, contractors and small businesses, particularly when time-sensitive shipments are involved.

Puerto Rico reporting suggests the Water Spirit matter may also be tied to a broader shortage of cargo dock space in San Juan. El Nuevo Día reported that Water Spirit 2 and Admiral Pride had been displaced from Piers 8, 9 and 10 by a private operator and were awaiting a new space from the Puerto Rico Ports Authority, while Puerto Rico Rep. José Aponte Hernández called for the

Navy Frontier Pier in Puerta de Tierra to be reopened and repaired to accommodate cargo and cruise vessels.

The San Juan Daily Star similarly reported that Aponte urged Puerto Rico officials to keep the Navy Frontier Pier open and operational, saying the harbor needs more facilities to reduce congestion and protect the flow of goods. Aponte argued that an island economy dependent on cargo and tourism should expand usable port space rather than restrict it.

VIPA's role, however, remains limited to the U.S. Virgin Islands. The authority emphasized that the restriction does not originate with VIPA and does not involve any VIPA-controlled port regulation.

Water Spirit customers with pending cargo are encouraged to contact the company directly for booking and shipment status. The company lists offices in San Juan, St. Croix, St. Thomas and Tortola, with its St. Croix office at Gallows Bay Dock and its St. Thomas office at Sandfill Dock.

VIPA's seaport schedule page lists several cargo companies that sail to St. Thomas, including Crowley, Norma H, Priority RORO, TOTE Maritime, Tropical Shipping and Water Spirit, though routes, cargo types, schedules and availability vary by carrier.

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