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St. Croix Water Production Trails Demand as Level 3 Drought Persists; Sahara Dust to Rise

VITEMA says St. Croix is producing 2.5 million gallons of water daily while demand ranges from 3 million to 3.2 million, as a Level 3 drought emergency strains supplies. Officials also warn Sahara dust will reach moderate to high levels during midweek.

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Satellite imagery shows Saharan dust spreading across the Caribbean near Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, as VITEMA warns concentrations will rise to moderate and high levels this week. By. NOAA.

St. Croix is producing about 2.5 million gallons of potable water per day against demand of between 3 million and 3.2 million gallons as the territory remains under a Level 3 drought

emergency, with the island carrying only about three days of stored water and more households turning to the public system as cisterns run dry.

VITEMA Director Daryl Jaschen outlined the strained water picture during a Government House press briefing Monday while also warning that Sahara dust is expected to increase Tuesday and Wednesday, reaching moderate to high levels and posing particular concerns for people with respiratory conditions.

“The Water and Power Authority, again through its contractor Seven Seas, has increased St. Croix’s daily production to 2.5 million gallons per day,” Mr. Jaschen said. Demand, however, remains between 3 million and 3.2 million gallons per day.

Conditions are somewhat better on St. Thomas, where Mr. Jaschen said production can reach 2.9 million gallons daily. “Our consumption rate and demand [is] about 2.6 to 2.7 [million gallons],” he said. St. Thomas currently has approximately four and a half days of stored water.

St. John has about four days of water in storage, according to Mr. Jaschen, who said cistern levels there are also falling and water-hauling activity has increased.

“We have a lot of water haulers going through St. John right now. They are consuming 200 to 225 gallons per day,” he said.

On St. Croix, meanwhile, water haulers continue to contribute to pressure drops farther along distribution lines despite restrictions on their operating hours, with Frederiksted continuing to experience the effects.

WAPA Director of Corporate Communications Chaneel Spencer said demand has risen across St. Croix as households with depleted cisterns increasingly rely on the public water system. That pressure has been compounded by several mainline leaks, which have contributed to low or no water pressure in higher-elevation communities.

Ms. Spencer urged residents who suspect leaks to report them to WAPA either online or by telephone so they can be investigated.

With storage levels limited across all three major islands, Mr. Jaschen urged residents to continue conserving water and avoid nonessential use.

“Now is not the time to wash cars,” he said.

He encouraged residents to take shorter showers, wait until they have full loads before doing laundry, repair dripping fixtures and reduce unnecessary water use while preparing food and washing dishes. He suggested washing fruits and vegetables in a bowl and waiting until there is a substantial amount of dishes before running a dishwasher or washing them by hand.

The drought strain comes alongside persistent heat. According to the AccuWeather heat index cited Monday, conditions felt hotter than 100 degrees.

VITEMA is also warning residents about another increase in Sahara dust after weeks of hazy conditions across the region.

“It’s been here for several weeks and months now, but coming in more tomorrow and Tuesday night, reaching moderate to high levels,” Mr. Jaschen said.

He advised residents with respiratory conditions to limit outdoor activity while dust concentrations are elevated.

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