

The Virgin Islands Consortium

V.I. Waste Management Reduces Street Sweeping On St. Croix, Business Owners React

VIC News / **Published On December 10, 2014 07:29 PM /**

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Business owners in St. Croix's Frederiksted and Christiansted towns were given notice in November of the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority's intent to cease all street sweeping services in both towns. In a telephone interview with a Waste Management official on Tuesday, the *VI Consortium* learned that street cleaning services in the two towns have been reduced, but not suspended altogether. And some Frederiksted business owners are speaking out about the trash problem in the historic town.

Stella Saunders, communications manager for the V.I. Waste Management Authority, said businesses across the territory were issued a notice reminding them of the law that requires them to keep their storefront areas clean.

"A press release was sent out to all businesses within the territory just reminding them, number one, that it is the law that they are encouraged to clean up within their storefront area and advising the St. Croix business community within the Christiansted and Frederiksted towns that we were going to be removing the street sweepers from the territory." she said.



Business owners across the territory could face fines of

\$1,000 for disposing waste from their businesses in public carts.

"But, what we've done," Saunders continued, "is reduce their days in town to three days a week--Monday, Thursday and Saturday."

When asked what triggered the authority's decision to scale down its street sweeping service in the St. Croix towns, Saunders would only say that the decision was an "internal" one.

"It was an internal decision based on the needs of the authority and the staffing needs of the authority," she said.

Saunders further explained that street sweeping services are offered only in Christiansted and Frederiksted towns, and it is not a service provided on St. Thomas or St. John.

"When the Authority was formed in 2004, the street sweepers on St. Croix were incorporated into our staff, and they were not incorporated over on St. Thomas and St. John," she said.

Saunders pointed out, however, that street cleaning services for St. Thomas and St. John were "retained with the Department of Public Works."

"Public Works uses their roadside crews to utilize any roadside cleaning, which is actually under the legal auspices of the Public Works Department," she explained.

When asked if the reduction of street sweeping services in Christiansted and Frederiksted would be something temporary, Saunders said she could not respond to the question.

"I don't have a response to that right now," she said. "We have not determined when or if we would be pulling that fully from the town areas, at this point."

The *VI Consortium* spoke with some Frederiksted business owners to get their take on the reduced street sweeping services in the town. It turns out that one business owner had a great deal to say about what he's calling a "garbage problem" there.

Chuck Brittain, the new owner of Polly's On the Pier, located on Strand Street on the waterfront, said some business owners have been frustrated with the amount of debris that litters downtown Frederiksted.

"Some businesses are supporting and doing the clean up, but a lot of them have become very frustrated with the constant garbage problem that's here," he said.



Waste Management Authority in Estate Williams Delight, St. Croix.

"I think the main problem in Frederiksted is that Waste Management is picking up first thing in the morning all of the garbage cans, and everything that goes up during the day, the homeless and the street guys are going through the garbage at night and then the wind blows it everywhere," he explained. "So, that's why a lot of this is on the streets of Frederiksted."

With that, he suggested Waste Management change its garbage collection times in order to help combat the problem of overnight littering.

"If Waste Management could change their pick-up to late in the afternoon, we would see a lot of this going away and we wouldn't have these other types of problems going on on the street right here," he said, looking out at the street through a large window facing the waterfront.

However, Brittain also pointed out that businesses should do their part to keep their storefront area clean, something he says he does everyday.

"It's important for businesses to take care of what's in front of them, but Waste Management needs to do their part and just that one change would make a huge difference in what's going on in Frederiksted," he said.

As for the street sweepers that walk through the town during the day, Brittain said they mostly pick up debris from the trash that has been strewn on the streets at night.

"Mainly, what they're picking up is what's coming out of the garbage cans at night from the street guys going through the garbage can and just throwing it out on to the streets and it blows everywhere," he said. "So, that's a lot of the problem."

Brittain said he would be satisfied with the new street sweeping schedule of three days per week, if Waste Management "would do their garbage pick ups for the cans in the evenings so all that garbage that's thrown in during the day doesn't get thrown back out by the people of the evenings," he reiterated.



of the popular waterfront restaurant in January 2014.

Owners at Yam Yam West say the street in front the

business is not being swept by Waste Management workers.

"It's been a consistent problem in the four years I've been in St. Croix, especially right here on the waterfront, where they're hanging out on the street benches and they're looking for something to eat, or whatever, and you can't blame them for what's going on, but it's being tossed out on the sides.

"And that's what we see in the mornings, Styrofoam being blown down the street, cups, a bag torn open, because they're looking for something," Brittain continued. "So, if we do the pick up in the afternoon with Waste Management, a lot of this problem would go away and going to three days a week would work for us."

He said he has spoken personally with several senators about the matter.

"I know Senator Sanes and his assistant are very strong about trying to get Waste Management in here everyday because they know how important it is," Brittain said, referring to the necessity of keeping the town's streets free of debris as an important component of tourism and maintaining a good impression when cruise ships dock at the pier.

Just a short distance from Polly's, the owners of Yam Yam West Fast Food, located on King Street, say they are dealing with a very different trash-pick up problem.

"We hardly see them," said Islam Qattoum. "No body cleans in front of my shop."

"Every morning and every night we sweep and clean outside, everyday," he further lamented, adding that this has been the case for at least two of the four years his business has been in Frederiksted.

However, Qattoum cited "racism" as the reason he believes the street directly outside his store is not being swept. He said he has observed the Waste Management worker, whom he describes as "a 60-65 year-old Crucian man," sweeping the street in front of the other businesses on King Street, but avoiding his shop.

"I don't know, maybe it's because I'm Arab," Qattoum said, visibly frustrated.

What the worker has been doing, the store owner went on to explain, is leaving the green garbage receptacle in front of the Yam Yam store and not returning for it for the remainder of the day. He said he has called Waste Management about the issue and tried to track down the man's supervisor, but has been unsuccessful in doing so.

Qattoum said after he called police about the garbage receptacle being left in front of his business, something he describes as "harassment," the worker, within the last month, has stopped storing the equipment there. He said the street in front of his store is still not being swept on the days it should be.

The *VI Consortium* placed a follow-up call to Saunders about the issues Qattoum raised. She said she had not been aware of the matter and would look into it. However, she pointed out that if business owners in Christiansted or Fredriksted towns are facing street cleaning issues, they should contact the branch office in Estate Williams Delight at (340) 712-4962 and file a complaint.

As of press time, the *VI Consortium* had not received additional information from Saunders regarding Qattoum's claims.

Trash Haulers Update

When asked about the status of the negotiations between Waste Management and the territory's solid waste haulers that began after contract disputes erupted in the summer, Saunders said, "We have been negotiating reduction of services and we have finalized our negotiations on St. Croix and we are in the process of finalizing negotiations with the haulers in St. Thomas. Once that's done, then we will announce the schedule for the reduction of house-to-house collection."

Saunders said negotiations with the St. Thomas haulers are expected to wrap up by end of year.

Waste Management is seeking to reduce house-to-house pick-up service from twice weekly on St. Croix to once per week; and three times weekly on St. Thomas, to once per week.