The Virgin Islands Consortium

DLCA Subpoenas Gas Station Owners To Check For Price Gouging

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The Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs (DLCA) Friday said it is monitoring the price of gasoline in the Virgin Islands, even as the price of oil has seen a steep decline in recent months and is now bottoming out at about $50 per barrel. Officials also told *VI Consortium* the department had subpoenaed local gas station owners, forcing them to disclose the price at which they last purchased gasoline.

That's according to DLCA Commissioner designee Devin Carrington, who said his department has received the subpoenaed information from some of the gasoline retailers.

"We have subpoenaed this week from all the [gas] retailers, information on their purchases of the fuel and the price they bought it at, and who they bought it from, and we're looking at what price they are selling it, so that we can come to some determination as to whether or not price gouging is going on," Carrington said.

Asked whether DLCA had determined if price gouging was taking place, Carrington said because the subpoena was only issued on Wednesday, "we are compiling the information and haven't analyzed it as it."

With low oil prices, many states in the U.S. have been enjoying gas prices below $2 per gallon; however, the territory continues to average upwards of $3 at the pump. And while DLCA says it has taken into consideration that some gasoline retailers may still be using fuel purchased from HOVENSA at a time when oil prices were higher, it is also "aware that there are retailers who have since purchased new supplies from other wholesalers at reduced cost."

DLCA says it's "placing retailers and the general public on notice that it shall exercise its statutory regulatory authority to ensure that prices being charged to consumers at the pump, accurately reflect the reduced cost paid by those retailers so that those reduced costs are passed on to the Virgin Islands consumer."

Furthermore, the department says it would take "enforcement action" against gasoline retailers who is found to be over-charging consumers.

"If and where it is discovered that unreasonable prices are being charged consumers that do not accurately reflect the cost savings enjoyed by a retailer, the department shall utilize all measures provided by statute to abate such activity, up to and including enforcement action against offenders," officials say.

DLCA says it stands ready to "protect the interests of the consumers of the Virgin Islands to ensure that a reasonable price is charged for the purchase of gasoline at the pump."

The *VI Consortium* will continue to follow this story.