

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Engine Of St. Croix JetBlue Flight En Route To Puerto Rico Hit By Birds, Plane Grounded

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A St. Croix JetBlue flight en route to Puerto Rico on Thursday night returned to the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport and was grounded for hours after what may have been two birds colliding with the aircraft's left engine, passengers told *VI Consortium* Thursday.



Henry E. Rolhsen Airport on

Thursday night, Feb. 26

According to three passengers who debarked JetBlue flight 341, the aircraft, which was originally scheduled to depart at 4:29 p.m., took off from the airport at about 6 p.m., and was airborne for about five minutes when, what they believed to be birds, collided with the aircraft's left engine. One passenger told *VI Consortium* he heard two loud crashing sounds in the aircraft.

"You could hear when the birds hit like boom, boom and they just turned around the whole plane," the passenger said.

The passengers say after the incident occurred, a foul odor engulfed the plane's cabin. The aircraft immediately returned to the St. Croix airport and made an emergency landing.

The Virgin Islands Port Authority's fire service truck and a police vehicle met the returning aircraft on the tarmac to check for any damage the impact might have caused. Airport officials said a Seaborne Airlines plane coming in from Puerto Rico circled the sky before it could land.

JetBlue employees at the scene told *VI Consortium* they could not provide information about the incident because they were not authorized to speak on behalf of the company.

An 8:15 call made to Port Authority Public Information Officer Monifa Braithwaite on Thursday night did not produce more details of the incident, as Braithwaite was not aware the incident had occurred. Braithwaite said she would look into it. As of press time, *VI Consortium* had not received a call back from the Port Authority.

Calls made to JetBlue's customer service on Thursday night confirmed that JetBlue flight 341 involved in the incident had been grounded in St. Croix, and that its latest departure to Puerto Rico was scheduled for 9:14 p.m. The customer service representative did not confirm the reason for the grounding of the aircraft.

Besides the few passengers that debarked the aircraft, most remained on the plane as JetBlue had given passengers the choice to travel on the same flight after the incident was investigated or re-book for Saturday night. Passengers who opted for another flight would not be able to travel on JetBlue's Friday flight because it was already completely booked, *VI Consortium* was told.

No passengers or crew were hurt in the incident.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has been calling for the closure of the Anguilla landfill on St. Croix because birds attracted to the landfill have proven to be a flight



JetBlue counter at St. Croix's

Henry E. Rolhsen Airport

Currently, the Anguilla landfill isn't accepting trash from consumers, as a waste transfer station, built by the V.I. Waste Management Authority in 2012, began accepting refuse. The new facility, located in Peter's Rest, requires refuse to be bundled and wrapped upon drop-off. Residents may use the new facility or one of the island's other collection centers. Still, the Anguilla landfill remains open, and in a meeting held in Jan. 2013, V.I. Port Authority officials requested an extension past the planned complete closure of 2016.

"The FAA is open to possibly approving an extension, but not pleased that the request came through the Environmental Protection Agency office," said Port Authority legal counsel Don Mills.

In a statement released Jan. 17, 2013, WMA Executive Director May Adams Cornwall said she was concerned that the extension request made gave the perception that the authority has been slow to act in relation to the landfill's closure.

"I am concerned with the impression which may be left with some that the authority has been dilatory in our effort to permanently close the Anguilla landfill," she said.

Feature Image: File photo of JetBlue aircraft at St. Croix's airport. Not necessarily the aircraft involved in the incident.