

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senate Committee Should Examine "Black Smut," Gittens Says

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ST. CROIX – A local Senator said he wants the Senate Committee on Health, Hospital and Human Services to investigate the “potential major health risk to residents” of the black mold that primarily affects the western end of the island.

Sen. Kenneth Gittens said he wrote a letter to Sen. Kurt Vialet, chairman of the committee, asking him to convene hearings of his committee on the “pervasive black mold/smut problem that is seen more so in the Frederiksted area.”

“As I explained last year, this black smut that we are seeing is similar to what residents have seen in parts of Kentucky,” Gittens said. “It may be more than a coincidence that

London-based DIAGEO – who also has a distillery and storage area here – faced fines in the state of Kentucky after their bourbon barrel storage warehouses was blamed for emitting ethanol vapors that promoted the growth and appearance of a black fungus on nearby properties.”

Gittens said he hoped his Senate colleagues would act immediately on the black mold issue.

“It has been too long,” he said. “I really want to see some swift movement relative to this matter and hopefully we can get some answers within 30 days so that we may develop a resolution to the matter.”

The St. Croix senator said it is likely that vapors escaping from the rum distillery process and storage warehouse are the source of the black mold, but that the sources must be positively identified and the health risks determined so that an abatement program can begin.

“Our residents deserve the best quality of life which includes good health and a clean environment, but in order to do so, it is up to all of us to ensure that laws protecting our health and safety are strictly enforced,” Gittens said. “There is no justification for us to be at risk in and around our homes but it has been more than a year that our residents have been subjected to poor air quality and this black fungus accumulating on our properties and more than a year since I first brought attention to the problem and called for solutions.”

Feature Image: Street sign in Estate Cane Carlton