

The Virgin Islands Consortium

DLCA 'Monitoring' Businesses For Price Gouging As Hurricane Danny Intensifies

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2lb Uncle Ben's rice for \$5.99

ST. CROIX -- The Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs Acting Commissioner Devin Carrington says DLCA will be monitoring businesses "to ensure that prices for goods and services essential to storm preparation and recovery are reasonably priced" as Hurricane Danny becomes stronger, to ensure that customers are not being take advantage of during a season when supermarkets are expected to see an increase in customer patronage.

That's according to a press release the department issued this afternoon, adding that it's asking residents who suspect instances of price gouging to immediately report the illegal practice.

"Given the department's current lack of manpower to monitor the hundreds of businesses in the Virgin Islands, it is critical that the consumer assist the department by acting as our eyes and ears to prevent the possibility of price gouging," stated Carrington.

"I've always advocated greater consumer participation and activism in the business of consumer protection. After all, we are all consumers and should bear some degree of responsibility regarding receiving the best value for our hard earned money. Consumer vigilance and reporting to the department provides an important mechanism through which the department can protect the public from unscrupulous individuals and entities that would seek to take advantage of the consumer during times of emergency," he added.

Based on Virgin Islands Code, all businesses in the territory should have provided a mandated price list of goods and merchandise in stock at the beginning of the Hurricane Season, June 1, with additional lists due the first day of each month during the season, according to the release. Upon the declaration of emergency by the governor regarding an imminent storm, prices submitted in the listing are frozen so as to prevent unreasonable price increases prior to, during and after the storm. Those prices remain frozen until the governor declares that the emergency has ended.

The department is currently initiating enforcement action against businesses that have failed to submit the list, the commissioner stated. In addition to a \$5000 fine for failure to do so, those businesses are also subject to a \$200 per day fine for each day the submission of the list is delinquent.

"The department's authority to license businesses carries with it the responsibility to regulate them in the interest of the consumer," Carrington went on. "The department and I take this responsibility seriously and shall aggressively enforce the law."

For further information regarding this issue, or to report instances of possible price gouging, call the DLCA at the following numbers: 713.3522 on St. Croix; 714.3522 on St. Thomas.