

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Signs Executive Order Aimed At Fighting Climate Change In Territory

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp on Friday, October 16 signed an executive order to prepare the territory for the impacts of climate change, according to a press release Government House issued on Monday.

According to the release, the executive order provides for the commencement of a territorial climate change initiative, and facilitates close cooperation among the federal government, the Government of the Virgin Islands, the private sector, civil society sector, and the wider community.

"The impacts of climate change are adversely affecting ecosystems, communities, economies, and public health across the Nation, with the United States Virgin Islands experiencing excessively high temperatures, increasingly severe droughts, and increasing intensity of downpours," said Mr. Mapp. "Communities that already face economic or health-related challenges will experience higher levels of disruption from climate change impacts given that the United States Virgin Islands, like most small islands, are particularly vulnerable."

The governor then pointed out the territory's "fragile" ecosystems, limited freshwater resources, small population and economy, and said the ability for the islands to absorb climate change-related shocks like storms and other forms of natural disasters will be constrained.

Through the order, Mr. Mapp will establish the Virgin Islands Climate Change Council, according to the release. The Council will function as a coordinating mechanism, receiving the full cooperation of all public sector institutions and instrumentalities, and shall work with federal and local agencies, academic and research institutions, and the private and non-profit sectors.

The Council will also designate a public institution or network of institutions as necessary, to host and manage the data and tools required for public information and climate adaptation decision-making. Furthermore, it will make provisions for the establishment of a web-based portal to support integration of said data.

One of the main goals of the council is to develop and present to the governor by September 30, 2016 a policy for climate change adaptation and subsequently coordinate implementation of a public engagement strategy, the purpose of which will be to inform the public about climate change issues, enhance the public's understanding of possible actions at personal and societal levels, and encourage full community participation in climate change adaptation initiatives.

In mid-June, the governor [announced](#) that he'd given former Senator Shawn-Michael Malone the position of Climate Change Coordinator, a job that gives the former contender for delegate to congress a direct concentration on climate change issues affecting the territory.

"The greater vulnerability of the territory is based also on the concentration of hotels, businesses, critical infrastructure, and residential development in the coastal area, which increases exposure to storm surge and sea level rise," Mr. Mapp said.

"Assessments of the economic impact of climate change on Caribbean islands indicate that the substantial impact will be from sea level rise, and that areas which will be impacted most are tourism and infrastructure. Climate change is known to impact also human health through three mechanisms: extreme heat, natural disasters, and infections and diseases," he added.

The Governor went on: "Climate change affects the fundamentals of good human health to include clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food, and secure shelter. It is prudent to anticipate that the population of the United States Virgin Islands will begin to display a relatively high level of vulnerability to the health impacts of climate change, given that it is

an aging population which already is experiencing a number of health disparities."

Of the five most prominent health issues in the territory - diabetes, heart disease, HIV/AIDS, asthma, and hypertension - four will be exacerbated by climate change, the release stated.

"In order to ensure climate preparedness and build a resilient community, all the social sectors in the United States Virgin Islands must work together to safeguard our natural resource base, social infrastructure, economic base, and communities," the governor concluded.

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