

The Virgin Islands Consortium

With \$99,000 Grant, Coastweeks Doubles Down On Goal Of Pristine Beaches

VIC News / **Published On August 28, 2016 10:46 AM /**

Staff **August 28, 2016**



Coastweeks events -- which features the clean-up of numerous beaches in the territory and shallow waters near the shorelines --- will commence on Sept. 17 and run through Oct. 3, the University of the Virgin Islands has announced.

This year, Coastweeks events will include a renewed emphasis on litter prevention, thanks to a \$99,000 Marine Debris Program grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to researchers at UVI.

Civic groups, students and individual volunteers will supply the manpower and the global Ocean Conservancy and the Virgin Islands Marine Advisory Service (VIMAS) is doing the

organizing. An international initiative, the Conservancy introduced the concept 30 years ago in an effort to collect and track debris that can pollute the ocean and damage marine life.

"There's always been an educational component to Coastweeks," Marcia Taylor, VIMAS coordinator for St. Croix, noted, but this year it will be enhanced because of the Marine Debris grant. "We're going to be using one program to support the other."

"Without educating the community, we cannot expect to see any change as clean-ups only address the problem in the here and now," said Howard Forbes Jr., VIMAS coordinator for St. Thomas. "With these combined educational efforts coupled to our annual clean-ups, we expect to see a reduction in the amount of trash we find on our coasts. This in turn will decrease the frequency at which these beaches will need to be cleaned."

V.I. Coastweeks 2016 will open Sept. 17, with clean-ups on Brewer's Beach on St. Thomas and Southgate Beach on St. Croix. The opener on St. John is tentatively scheduled for Trunk Bay. The Friends of the V.I. National Park coordinates activities on St. John.

According to the Ocean Conservancy, lost or abandoned fishing gear poses the greatest danger to marine life as fish can get trapped in nets or entangled in lines. Plastic bags are a close second; turtles and other sea life mistake them for food.

The organization keeps track of the various types of debris found on the world's beaches. In 2015, worldwide, the top five categories were cigarette butts, plastic beverage bottles, food wrappers, plastic bottle caps and straws/stirrers.

The Virgin Islands picture was similar. Forbes reported the top five categories overall were plastic bottles, cigarette butts, food wrappers, glass bottles and plastic utensils.

But all sorts of trash is found at V.I. sites. Taylor said, "We get a lot of fishing gear" along with bottles and cans at the Frederiksted Pier clean-up, where divers join in the annual clean-up.

"The V.I. Waste Management Authority is partnering on this event by assisting with waste removal," Taylor said.

The Marine Debris program will continue after Coastweeks. It includes a teacher training workshop to help teachers find ways to integrate education about debris prevention in the curriculum.

For more information, or to volunteer for Coastweeks, call Howard Forbes Jr. on St. Thomas at (340) 693-1672; Marcia Taylor on St. Croix at (340) 692-4046; or Karen Jarvis on St. John at (340) 779-4940. For a detailed list of the times and places of clean-ups, visit <http://vimas.uvi.edu> or see this direct link.