

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Plastic Bag Ban Bill Now Law In U.S. Virgin Lands

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ST. CRIX -- Governor Kenneth Mapp formally signed his proposal to reduce litter and protect marine life into law late Friday, Government House announced Sunday afternoon.

Bill No. 31-0379 will restrict the use of plastic shopping bags in the territory beginning next year. Members of the 31st Legislature unanimously supported the governor's proposal on September 20. It was one of three solid waste management reform bills sent down to senators by Mr. Mapp in February.

The law requires businesses and organizations to utilize reusable bags or recyclable paper bags with the goal of eliminating plastic bags at point of sale check-outs. Plastic bags still will be allowed where no acceptable substitute exists, such as for wrapping

prepared foods or meats. The plastic bag regulations will take effect on January 1, 2017. However, penalties will not be assessed until April 1 to allow retailers time to make the transition.

Enactment of the plastic bag ban places the Virgin Islands in a leadership position in the region. While most Caribbean islands have debated banning plastic bags, only a few jurisdictions have successfully implemented restrictions.

Mr. Mapp called the new law a victory on behalf of public health and the environment.

“I want to thank the members of the Legislature and the members of my administration who worked efficiently and collaboratively to ensure the passage of this landmark legislation in the Territory, but we cannot stop now,” the territory's leader wrote in his transmittal letter to Senate President Neville James. “Once we have fully enacted all three of our recycling bills, the territory will be well on its way to a cleaner and greener community.”

Bills to establish a redemption value on every beverage container sold in the U.S. Virgin Islands and to enforce recycling and the separation of trash are now awaiting consideration by the 31st Legislature's Rules Committee. Mr. Mapp told senators that, once enacted, the new laws will result in a significant reduction in the amount of waste going into our landfills.

“I urge the members of the Legislature to pass my proposed bills on source separation (Bill No. 31-0380) and on comprehensive waste reduction and recycling programs (Bill No. 31-0316),” he wrote. “These proposed practices have been implemented on a national level and have proven to be quite successful. We must adopt these measures if we truly want to preserve the beauty and purity of the Virgin Islands. These measures will result in a significant reduction in the amount of waste going into our landfills.”