

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Suspects Steal Public Works Backhoe To Create Paintball Field At Harvey Project

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ST. CROIX -- St. Croix Police Chief Winsbut McFarland on Tuesday said that thieves had stolen a backhoe belonging to the Department of Public Works, which was stationed at the Central High School, and drove the machine all the way to the Harvey Housing Community to clear a piece of government-owned land to create a paintball field.

The incident was revealed to reporters at an event at the housing community yesterday, dubbed "Saving Private Harvey", aimed at securing the neighborhood with community involvement, more activities and, critically, 24/7 police presence. The initiative has been ongoing for about two weeks, and has seen exceptional results, with crime reducing to zero, according to police.

"They destroyed the fence at St. Croix High School to get it out, drove it here, and cleared out this entire patch of property," said St. Croix Administrator Stephanie Williams, who was present at yesterday's event representing the Office of the Governor.

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Once the backhoe was in the area and the land was cleared, the suspects then erected old tires, refrigerators and other abandoned items to create their paintball field, according to police. They later stole paintball pellets and guns from John's Hobby Shop, police say, a fledgling paintball field that has been adversely affected by the robbery.

"They stole cartons and cartons of yellow paint," said Lieutenant Robert Mathews, chief of investigations at the V.I.P.D. "And you can see from the paint that it's all yellow," he added, referring to yellow paintballs found on old tires that had been used at the makeshift paintball field.

"We recovered empty cartridges in the bush. There's an extensive bush area, so they're using the bushes to run their enterprise, and that's why we're clearing the bush," Lt. Mathews added.

Police say that contrary to the novel appearance, suspects were using the field to hone in their shooting skills in case of a shootout with police. Chief McFarland said the V.I.P.D. was actively working on the case.

The force is asking anyone with information that may lead to the arrest of suspects to call the anonymous tip service, Crime Stoppers USVI at 1-800-222-8477.

Feature Image: Bates Trucking backhoe clearing up land at the Harvey Housing Community on Tuesday, as part of the V.I.P.D.'s "Saving Private Harvey" initiative. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)