

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Dept. Of Health To Reissue All Food Handler Cards Following Discovery Of Fraud

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Ernice Gilbert **November 27, 2016**



The Department of Health is undertaking a major effort to roll out new food handler cards to the 12,000 Virgin Islanders who have them, as it attempts to modernize its system to fight fraud. D.O.H. says it expects to start the process of issuing the new cards -- at no extra cost to cardholders -- by the end of the holiday season, or sometime in January, 2017.

The move follows the Department of Justice's arrest of two individuals ([Lou Hermon, 47, of Castleburg, St. Croix, and Kesha Williams, 40, of Sugar Estate](#)), charging them each with two counts of making fraudulent claims upon the government; two counts of conversion of government property; two counts of embezzlement by public and private

officers; two counts of buying, receiving or possessing stolen property; and two counts of aiding and abetting, after allegedly circumventing D.O.H.'s procedures for distributing the health cards by issuing food handler cards to clients without having them go through the proper procedural process.

The information was made available to The Consortium and other media outlets on Wednesday afternoon, during a teleconference that included D.O.H. and D.O.J. officials.

Between 60 to 100 persons currently holding food handler cards did not go through the proper procedures, D.O.H. revealed. Attorney General Claude Walker said the investigation was conducted solely in St. Thomas, but he did not rule out similar activity ongoing in St. Croix.

"The Department of Health is taking this opportunity to modernize the processing and issuing operations of the food handler card system," said Taetia Phillips-Dorsett, territorial assistant commissioner of D.O.H. "This endeavor is in line with [Department of Health] Commissioner Dr. Michelle Davis's plan to improve the safety and security of all food establishments in the territory."

D.O.H. is urging cardholders to stay tuned to all forms of media for further details on the new system, to include the dissemination of information relative to when the cards will go out, and actions, if any, that those in possession of food handler cards may need to take. D.O.H. will be issuing an alphabetical schedule by last name for cardholders to receive their new cards. "There will be not cost to clients associated with the issuance of the new cards," Mrs. Dorsett said, adding that each cardholder's expiration date will remain the same.

The new cards will include better safeguards against fraud, including the following, according to D.O.H.:

- Encryption mechanism as an additional identifier
- Retooling some standard operating procedures within D.O.H.'s community health clinics relative to the food handlers card
- Ensuring that proper documentation is included in D.O.H.'s electronic record-keeping system, to include the initial registration for card applicants
- Continuing to do routine cross checks between those clients that are registered in the clinics, those clients that are referred to the nurses in the clinics to do vital signs and vital testing, and also all of the food handler clients that are referred either to a private laboratory or hospital laboratory to do the appropriate sampling or testing for pathogens that may be detrimental to food preparation.

Mrs. Dorsett said while D.O.H. knows of 60 to 100 fraudulently issued cards, "We do believe that there is some fraud still ongoing, that's why we're modernizing. We want to cast a wide safety net in both districts."

That goal is to initiate the change by the end of the holiday season. The department has discussed the process through which it aims to complete the monumental undertaking. This includes weekday and weekend overtime hours, as well as temporarily reassigning D.O.H. employees from other departments to help bring the system online. Those employees will also be trained to assist D.O.H.'s regular community health staff with addressing the large volume quickly.

