

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Forms New Task Force In Push To Protect Public Health And Environment

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ST. THOMAS -- Leaders from the private and public sectors met Friday with Governor Kenneth Mapp to discuss opportunities to effectively promote local recycling, anti-litter and environmental protection efforts, Government House announced late Friday.

Members of the governor's newly formed Recycling Task Force will work together to develop policy and coordinate public information campaigns that will support initiatives to keep the islands clean and reduce the pressure on the territory's overburdened landfills, Mr. Mapp said.

The governor addressed the task force, thanking them for their commitment, and urging members to support legislation 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 – two of [three landmark solid waste reform bills](#) sent down to the Legislature by the governor in February. The third measure, to restrict the use of plastic bags, [was approved by senators in September](#). The plastic bag regulations will take effect on January 1, 2017. However, penalties will not be assessed until April 1, 2017 to allow retailers time to make the transition.

“Get in touch with your senators and let them know the importance of this legislation,” Mr. Mapp said. “We can’t accept those lobbying for private interest against these bills at the expense of the territory.”

The governor indicated that he remained hopeful that the source separation and bottle bills would be enacted before the close of the 31st Legislature.

Department of Planning and Natural Resources Commissioner Dawn Henry, who assisted in drafting the solid waste reform bills and was in attendance Friday, has said that it is critical that all three solid waste measures are approved in order to fulfill the goal of significantly extending the life of the territory’s landfills and keeping bottles and cans off beaches and roadsides.

Participants at Friday’s meeting included members of the St. John-based Island Green Living Association, the newly appointed Executive Director of Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority, Roger Merritt, several cabinet members, business leaders and other concerned citizens. Education Commissioner, Dr. Sharon McCollum, introduced the group to her department’s new anti-litter mascot and Agriculture Commissioner Carlos Robles highlighted his agency’s efforts to implement large scale composting projects.

VIWMA Board Chairman Harith Wickrema, who helped to organize Friday’s meeting, praised the recent efforts of the administration, but said it was critical that agencies coordinate their public information campaigns.

“We need to work together to develop one consistent message,” he said.

Task Force member Jennifer Matarangas-King, Vice President for Innovative Communications, pledged Innovative’s commitment to supporting recycling efforts and to assist in getting the word out to its customers and viewers of TV2.

The goals of the governor’s Recycling Task Force include further incorporation of environmental education into the K-12 curriculum, providing greater recycling and reuse options and enhanced community education and outreach programs. The Task Force is expected to meet regularly in order coordinate and implement these initiatives.

Feature Image: Commission of Agriculture Carlos Robles, Governor Kenneth Mapp, Deputy Chief Rochelle Corneiro, VIWMA Exc. Director Roger Merritt and Director of Communications Cherie Munchez. (Credit: Government House)