

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Thomas Fire Station Shuttered For A Day Because Of 'Insufficient Manpower'

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ST. THOMAS -- In what appears to be a direct result of Governor Kenneth Mapp's "consideration" that V.I.P.D. and the V.I. Fire Service drastically cutback on overtime as the territory buckles under financial pressure, the Tango Company Fire Station located in Estate Fortuna here announced that the facility was closed on Friday due to the lack of manpower.

The release says Fire Service personnel normally stationed at the Tango Company facility had been "reassigned to other fire stations throughout the St. Thomas- St. John District," adding that all 911 calls concerning emergencies in the Fortuna and Bordeaux areas were to be rerouted to the Echo Company Fire Station.

What that means is that there could be shifts where fire houses would not be manned for an 8-hour period, but the response would come from other fire houses that are opened and manned. - Governor Kenneth Mapp

The circumstances surrounding yesterday's temporary closure falls in line with what Mr. Mapp deemed during a recent press conference as considerations that were to be implemented only if the territory's condition worsened; he also used those considerations to compel senators to pass his sin tax and property tax measures, stating that the bills' implementation would allay some of the more drastic cuts.

However, recent actions [from the V.I.P.D.](#) and now the V.I. Fire Service are proving otherwise.

St. Thomas-St. John Fire Chief Oral Wheatley said that overtime hours had been curtailed, and that some Fire Service personnel had called in sick.

Pointing to drastic actions that would be taken if senators failed to pass the new taxes, Mr. Mapp at the February 22 press conference, [said](#) his administration was prepared to order the V.I.P.D. as well as the Bureau of Corrections and the Fire Service, to reduce all overtime outlay by 80 percent. "What that means is that there could be shifts where fire houses would not be manned for an 8-hour period, but the response would come from other fire houses that are opened and manned," he said. "It means that overtime and special operations in the police department could be somewhat curtailed because the level of overtime disbursement must be reduced. In addition, the Bureau of Corrections may have to look at the transfer of additional persons out of the territory from the penal institution, so that the staff that exists would be able to adequately cover the shifts for those prisoners that remain on duty."

The governor stressed throughout his talk at the press conference that the considerations were not yet active, stating that the implementation of the new taxes would help in reducing the severity of the cutbacks.

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"That's going to have an impact in terms of our overall plan because the measures that the Legislature is working on, if they're enacted in early March, then the revenues that we would expect between March 1 and September 30 would increase... the bridge would be reduced, hence the ability not to implement some of these more difficult reforms," the governor said.

The Tango Company firehouse was set to reopen at 8:00 a.m. Saturday, but there was no guarantee that the situation would not reoccur in light of the territory's financial condition.