

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Foul Odor Causes Department Of Labor Closure Again

VIC News / **Published On April 07, 2017 09:05 PM /**

Staff **April 07, 2017**



ST. CROIX -- The Department of Labor, which started sending employees stationed at its St. Croix office home on Wednesday -- after some had complained about falling ill because of an elusive odor that has been affecting the department [for at least one year](#) -- announced on Friday that its offices would remain closed until Monday.

The release, extremely vague, apologizes for the closure but says nothing about the cause, which this publication has learned from people with firsthand knowledge of the matter, was precipitated by the foul smell that has vexed the department.

D.O.L. has been working to rectify the problem, according to Commissioner Catherine Hendry. She even assured this publication following a recent Government House event

on St. Croix, that the building housing the offices here was in good condition.

Earlier this month, Ms. Hendry [confirmed](#) to The Consortium that the St. Thomas D.O.L. office was affected by a reoccurring rodent problem.

Ms. Hendry's response came after an inquiry by this publication, following multiple messages by D.O.L. St. Thomas employees, who sent in pictures of dead rats captured on rat traps at the department, and complained that they were becoming ill.

One employee, who requested anonymity to speak candidly on the matter, described the problem as an "infestation of rats." This employee said the problem had been ongoing for years, and that the building also had iguanas as well as rodents apart from rats living in the facility. And as if to highlight certain unsanitary practices at the department, the employee said garbage bags were being reused.

"It's crazy. It's making us sick," this employee said.

For her part, Ms. Hendry said department officials were working to sanitize the facility, which she said is exterminated monthly, with hopes of eliminating the problem it altogether.

"VIDOL has taken the necessary steps required to protect employees and clients by sanitizing workstations and common areas regularly and laying traps to catch the rodents. On Friday, March 10, a professional cleaning company will be sanitizing all workstations, and on Monday, March 13, the exterminating company will be onsite to perform its monthly service, at which time we hope to eliminate the problem," Ms. Hendry said. It was not clear how one monthly service performance would solve a problem that has been reoccurring for years.

In June 2015, [it was revealed during a Committee on Finance hearing](#) that D.O.L. St. Thomas pays \$250,000 annually for the property that it's renting, while the St. Croix office is costing the government \$350,000 annually. In her statement to this publication, Ms. Hendry did not say who was paying for the monthly exterminating of the St. Thomas facility.

"The employees and community can rest assure that this matter is under control. At VIDOL, we strive to protect our employees and customers by maintaining an environment that is clean and safe. We appreciate the support and patience of our employees and customers during this time," Ms. Hendry said.