

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Homicides Continue To Rise Because 'There Are Too Many Guns On The Street', Police Commissioner Says

Crime / **Published On July 24, 2017 11:22 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **July 24, 2017**



ST. THOMAS -- As Governor Kenneth Mapp gets ready to announce major changes to the structure of the Virgin Islands Police Department at Government House here today, where it is expected that St. Croix Police Chief Winsbut McFarland will be named territorial chief of police, V.I.P.D. Commissioner Delroy Richards has said that one of the major issues in keeping the homicide count down in the territory, remains an apparent insurmountable amount of guns on the streets in both the St. Croix and St. Thomas districts, which he says continue to come into the territory through various ports.

"I think we have too many guns in the territory, that's number one. And the question is how do we control that. Well, we have looked at all the possibilities and we are working

very closely with the federal government in an effort to plug some of these holes," Mr. Richards told this publication during an employment drive held on St. Croix Saturday. He said the guns are coming through the airport, they were coming through the mails, and they are coming through the territory's seaports.

The commissioner said a major problem that continues to affect the territory is how easily guns come through the airport. He said individuals declare their guns -- sometimes multiple weapons at airports outside the territory (mostly on the mainland U.S.) -- these individuals then board flights coming to the U.S. Virgin Islands, however once they land in the territory, they do not declare the weapons. The commissioner said the USVI has a system in place that calls for the declaring of weapons by individuals once they arrive in the islands. But he added that the system has not been effective.

"That's an honor system because we don't know they're coming in," he admitted. "Nobody tells us." He said local law says individuals should immediately declare their weapons upon arrival, "But we can't force TSA [Transportation Security Administration] or the airlines to tell us, and the airlines have made it clear that their obligation is to their passenger."

Mr. Richards said the police department has had conversations with the federal government about the problem. "Tell us that Joe Blow is coming into the territory with five guns, so at least we'll be given an opportunity to allow these individuals to either register it, or we'll confiscate it. But the guns... It's too many guns on the street."

The commissioner said that every night guns are confiscated in the territory.

As of Friday, 10 regular homicides had been reported on St. Croix for 2017, and 16 regular homicides on St. Thomas during the same time. When vehicular homicides are factored in, the count climbs to 31 territory-wide, to include [Tuesday night's vehicular homicide](#), according to information provided by Mr. Richards.

With the pending announcement of Chief McFarland as territorial police chief today, the Mapp administration is hoping that the chief's strategies used on St. Croix that have so far proven effective, will work on a territorial basis.

But whether or not Chief McFarland's lauded efforts in St. Croix will prove effective on a territory-wide scale, will take months — if not years — to determine.