

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Waste Haulers Vow To Stop Collecting Trash From Private Entities In Protest Of New Tipping Fees

VIC News / **Published On July 28, 2017 11:40 PM /**

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ST. CROIX -- Late Friday, the Waste Management Authority issued a press release advising waste haulers of the implementation of tipping fees set to take effect on August 1. The fees, [delayed last year](#), will drastically increase the fees for collecting waste for residents and businesses alike, with cost going from zero to thousands of dollars in some instances.

Moments earlier, however, waste haulers on St. Croix to include Bates Trucking, Just Right Trucking, Atlantic Trucking, VI regulated Waste Management, Paradise Waste, Dan's Trucking and Marco Trucking, gathered outside the legislative building in Frederiksted to voice their concerns and lobby against the implementation of the new

fees, which comes at an average rate of \$52 per ton. Waste haulers say the new rates gravely damage their operations, with one owner describing the move as "business-ending."

"Number one, the tipping fees are really high out the sky," said James Bates, owner of Bates Trucking. He explained that a 20-yard bin, which is the equivalent of 20 tons, increases a customer's charge from having only to pay the waste hauler, to now include Waste Management as well. At 20 tons, the payment to W.M.A. would be \$1020 -- well over what it would cost for simply paying the waste hauler to dispose of the garbage.

W.M.A. says the tipping fee per ton ranges from \$31.28 to \$65.26 depending on the type of material being disposed.

"We gone from them not charging us anything to a thousand and change for one bin," Mr. Bates complained. "I just cleaned a property for a young lady, the cost for me was \$1340. One of her bins came in at 22," Mr. Bates said. At that weight, the tipping fee for one of the customer's three bins would be \$1144. If the three bins weighed about the same, the tipping fee cost would be \$3432. "These expensive tipping fees that they're coming with is going to cripple this economy," Mr. Bates said.

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Mr. Bates was not alone in his frustration. All the business owners gathered at the legislative building today were irate. They had just left the office of Senator Kurt Vialet seeking help, and wanted to get their message out to the public. At least three media houses, including The Consortium, were present. The waste haulers are calling on W.M.A. to delay the fees until a more reasonable solution is negotiated.

While the new fees dominated the impromptu press conference, the manner in which W.M.A. intends to collect the money also angered the waste haulers. Instead of creating a system whereby W.M.A. collects the fees directly from customers, the government agency is depending on the waste haulers to collect the fees from the customers, and then pass on the payment to W.M.A. Even worse, the waste haulers must first collect the waste from the customer, charge their regular price, take the waste to a W.M.A. scale, find out the weight and then communicate with the customer the tipping fee charge.

There's also the problem of effectively communicating the changes to customers. Residents have been baffled after learning of the additional charges, with businesses and private residents with major waste to dispose of, set to feel the burden.

"Just to give you an example of what's happening. One customer of mine that's not paying any tipping fee right now, he is going to be saddled with one tipping fee bill of \$3,800 a month. That's a major impact on any business. That's a grocery store, so if a loaf of bread is what it is now, it's going to be more, a lot more," said Lloyd Daniel, owner of Dan's Trucking.

The waste haulers spoke of a potential spike in illegal waste dumping if the tipping fees are allowed to take effect. "The community will be dirtier and there will be no control for managing the solid waste in the Virgin Islands," said Marcia Richards from VI Regulated Waste Management, adding that the cleanup would then become more costly for W.M.A.

Waste Management delayed the tipping fees last year after coming under pressure from lawmakers and residents alike who decried the new fees as too sudden and even too costly. Senator Novelle Francis and former Senator Kenneth Gittens had spoken openly about the matter, and Mr. Francis had proposed legislation calling for a delay in implementation.

But W.M.A. based its decision back then to delay the tipping fees on "ongoing improvements at the three receiving solid waste disposal facilities," and not necessarily pressure from the public and lawmakers. Mr. Daniel said while there were meetings last October with W.M.A., nothing conclusive relative to finding a fair balance came out of those meetings.

The waste haulers are asking for a flat rate similar to St. Thomas, whose waste haulers are currently allowed to include a flat fee in their charge, because according to W.M.A., there is currently no scale in St. Thomas to weigh the garbage.

"If we just get a flat rate where we could say it's \$50 more to empty the bin, we'll just put it in our price and business goes on again. Waste Management probably has problems trying to collect money, but the way how they're coming with it right now, it's going to be very hard on us and very confusing. So Tuesday come, we can't pickup no private Trash," Mr. Bates concluded.

Feature Image: From left to right, Lloyd Daniel, Marcia Richards, Shawn Baptiste (farther back), Mitchel Mathew, Marlind Thomas and James Bates.