

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Waste Management, Under Pressure, Suspends Implementation Of Tipping Fees

Business / **Published On August 03, 2017 07:45 AM /**

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ST. CROIX -- With pressure mounting, the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority on Wednesday suspended the implementation of solid waste tipping fees that had gone into effect one day earlier, a move that represents a big win for waste hauling companies, whose owners had been protesting the new fees and the manner in which they were to be collected.

The announcement was made through a press release. In it, W.M.A. said the fees will be delayed until September 1, giving the authority enough time to meet with waste haulers for negotiations. The suspension affects waste haulers territory-wide.

The dispute between W.M.A. and the waste haulers took center stage following an impromptu press conference that the haulers held with media houses outside the Senate building in Frederiksted on Friday. There, the owners of almost all the trucking companies on St. Croix -- among them Bates Trucking, Just Right Trucking, Atlantic Trucking, VI regulated Waste Management, Paradise Waste, Dan's Trucking and Marco Trucking -- shared their grievances with media houses, [including The Consortium](#).

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"Number one, the tipping fees are really high out the sky," said James Bates, owner of Bates Trucking on Friday. He explained that with the tipping fees, 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 tons," 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.

[Another protest](#) was held on Tuesday, this time outside the Waste Management facility in Williams Delight near the Sunshine Mall. There too, the haulers' stance remained the same. They feared they had become tax collectors, as Waste Management had encumbered them with the job of collecting the tipping fees from customers.

"We're here struggling for our businesses' survival today," said Lloyd Daniel of Dan's Trucking on Tuesday. "The Waste Management Authority fees are not going to allow us to operate as we have done in the past. It's going to be an impact on us, and it's also going to be an impact on the community at large."

A brief meeting was held with the haulers at the Williams Delight facility on Tuesday, led by Tawana Nicholas, W.M.A.'s director of engineering. But the meeting quickly disintegrated after W.M.A. refused to delay the tipping fees' implementation. Ms. Nicholas said the authority would return the Public Services Commission to recommend a territory-wide flat rate, but a meeting date had not been set.

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Waste Management's late decision to suspend tipping fees staves off a potential garbage catastrophe on St. Croix, as the trucking companies had vowed to stop collecting waste from residents with jobs requiring bins, as well as business entities. With the suspension of fees, the haulers will continue business as usual during the negotiating period.

The waste haulers expressed frustration with multiple issues. They contended that the tipping fees were too exorbitant with an average of \$52 per ton; and the manner in which the fees were to be collected, which saw waste haulers essentially becoming tax

collectors for the authority. The haulers advocated for a reasonable flat rate that could be included in a price that customers are already being charged by haulers. That way, customers would only be charged once price to include W.M.A.'s additional fee, without being shocked by the price, and without having to go through a two-step process that sees haulers charging their own fee, taking the waste to the landfill to be weighed and priced, and returning to the customer with another fee -- one even more expensive than what the hauler would have already charged.