

The Virgin Islands Consortium

DLCA Takes Action On Price Gouging; Sprint Finally Ramping Up Restoration Effort In USVI

Disaster Recovery / **Published On October 23, 2017 11:02 AM /**

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Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs Commissioner, Devin Carrington, said during Governor Kenneth Mapp's Friday press briefing that the department had started to take action against the out-of-control price gouging that has been ongoing in the territory following Hurricanes Irma and Maria. The announcement, coming over a month after Maria [badly damaged St. Croix](#), and six weeks following [Irma's devastation on St. Thomas](#), will be welcomed by residents, who have been sharing their grievances -- and pictures to back them up -- concerning retailers who have gouged everything from generators to snacks.

When Mr. Mapp declared a state of emergency for the territory before Hurricanes Irma and Maria struck, part of the changes that took effect included a freeze on all retail items, meaning goods sold at a certain price before the storms were not to be sold at a higher margin thereafter and before the state of emergency is lifted.

The state of emergency is still in effect, but prices on countless items have shot up nonetheless, with generators being an oft-gouged item.

Mr. Carrington said DLCA as of Friday had received two receipts for items whose prices had allegedly increased following the storms. The items said to have been gouged were insecticides and water, the commissioner said. He said that generators, ice and even laundry services were reportedly gouged as well. DLCA has turned over the two receipts to the Department of Justice (D.O.J.), with Mr. Carrington stating that the department would continue to provide more receipts to D.O.J. as they are submitted by residents.

Fines for price gouging include \$200 per instance (which Mr. Carrington said could be determined to mean each item on a receipt), and 180 days of imprisonment per instance, he said.

Mr. Mapp said he along with Attorney General Claude Walker had "an extensive" conversation with Sprint officials sometime last week, relative to the carrier's cellular service restoration in the USVI, which has been disappointing, according to The Consortium's Editorial Board. The Board opined that [USVI Sprint customers should abandon the company en masse](#) for failing to provide adequate and timely restoration support to its local customers, at a time when they needed it the most.

The governor said Sprint had finally gotten multiple technicians in the USVI and had deployed vessels with equipment with the intention to build "a tremendously more robust" network than was available before Hurricanes Irma and Maria. The company's late action has already caused it to lose a great number of its USVI customers, who grew impatient with its slow pace at restoring service.

Mr. Mapp said that 25 cruise ships were scheduled to dock at the various St. Thomas ports between November 10-30. With a host of other Caribbean destinations ravaged by storms this year, cruise lines have been clamoring to return to the USVI. On St. Croix, which over the years has seen far less cruise ships than St. Thomas, 90 calls from 164 requests had been approved as of last week, according to the governor. Before the storms, St. Croix was scheduled to receive only 40 ships for the entire season.

The Main Street Project's latest contract has been approved and was awarded to Island Roads for \$12.6 million. Mr. Mapp said the Department of Property and Procurement would soon issue the notice to proceed to the company.

On the jobs front, the governor reiterated that over 2,000 jobs had become available through the Department of Labor, and he encouraged residents to take advantage of the opportunities.

William Vogel, federal coordinating officer of FEMA Region II, said approximately 1,145 blue roofs had been installed as of Friday; 81,000 cubic yards of debris had been removed; 325 hurricane survivors were still staying at shelters, with FEMA working to move them to private living spaces; 27,000 individuals had registered for disaster

assistance, with about \$4.6 million in aid being distributed as of Friday; and the Small Business Association, Mr. Vogel said, had approved over \$4 million in low-interest loans as of Friday.

Feature Image: Men place ice in trunk of car. (Credit: [Irene Ali Photography](#))

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