

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Wait Time At Cyril E. King Airport To Be Significantly Reduced As Regular TSA Screening Resumes

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ST. THOMAS -- The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) will be able to return to its assigned area in the Cyril E. King Airport Terminal, where employees will use TSA equipment to screen travelers by this weekend, David Mapp, Virgin Islands Port Authority executive director, announced Friday.

The use of scanning equipment and machines should significantly reduce wait times during the screening process at CEKA, V.I.P.A. said. The announcement follows pre-Thanksgiving delays at CEKA, causing many travelers to miss their flights.

According to the Port Authority, TSA has been manually screening travelers in a temporary area outside of preclearance pending repairs to the CEKA terminal, which was severely damaged by two Category 5 Hurricanes in September. Mr. Mapp said air quality test results confirming that the preclearance area was safe for airport operations, were delivered this week to both TSA and VIPA. TSA has already begun the process of returning to their normal location and should be in place by Saturday, Mr. Mapp said. The executive director also advised travelers to arrive at least three to four hours early for their flights to allow enough time for the screening process. Normal operations at CEKA, to include increased flight availability to St. Thomas, is anticipated to begin by mid-December, V.I.P.A. said.

V.I.P.A. has been able to successfully operate most of its seaports as normal since the hurricanes, Mr. Mapp said. The Theovald Moorehead Dock and Terminal at Enighed Pond was recently reopened in St. John and barges have returned to the facility to transport vehicles and cargo to the island. The Austin "Babe" Monsanto Marine Terminal in Crown Bay welcomed the return of cruise ships to its port on November 21 as the Harmony of the Seas brought over 5,000 passengers plus 2,300 crew to St. Thomas.

Eight cruise ships berthed at Crown Bay in November and 30 ships are scheduled for December, according to V.I.P.A. Cruise ships have also returned to St. Croix, but at a much lower rate than St. Thomas: There were two calls in November, two visits are scheduled for December and 13 calls are scheduled for January at the Ann E. Abramson Marine Facility in Frederiksted, Mr. Mapp said. V.I.P.A.'s cruise schedules for both St. Thomas and St. Croix have been updated and are available online at www.viport.com. All cruise schedules are subject to change.

Mr. Mapp reminded the traveling public that most of its facilities were damaged during the storm and are in the process of being repaired. "V.I.P.A. has engaged the services of several contractors to perform temporary repairs so that we could reopen our facilities after the storms and enable travel and commerce. However, there are still extensive repairs that need to be made to our properties," he said. The Port Authority has entered into an agreement with Lemartec, Inc. to manage the reconstruction of its hurricane-damaged properties. CEKA has been targeted as the priority project, with an active construction schedule to begin in mid-January 2018. According to V.I.P.A., Lemartec, Inc. is one of the premier aviation construction management firms in the industry and has been licensed to do business in the territory for the past three years.

Mr. Mapp asked travelers to pardon the appearance at all VIPA facilities as renovations are ongoing. And he thanked the public for its continued patience as the authority works to rebuild its port facilities.