

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Defying Lawmakers, Mapp Will Move Forward With Plan To Burn Debris

VIC News / **Published On December 05, 2017 10:10 AM /**

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Governor Kenneth Mapp said during his hurricane recovery press briefing on Monday that he would move forward with a plan to burn 35 percent of vegetative debris left behind by Hurricanes Irma and Maria, defying lawmakers -- ten of whom supported and passed a measure that banned all burning of debris in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Mr. Mapp said he had not read the measure that passed, but warned senators that the territory has until March 20 to do away with the roughly 700,000 cubic yards of debris that will need to be disposed, after which the cost to dispose will be the responsibility of the local government.

The Senate measure, which was passed during a session on Friday, came following strong advocacy by organizations that oppose burning. They had written opinions, created petitions and lobbied senators -- all of which proved successful in convincing lawmakers that the practice should be halted. "We are placing the Army Corps of Engineers and FEMA on notice that this territory is a no-burning territory," Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly said during the session on Friday.

Instead of burning, the measure calls for chipping the debris, and piling it at the territory's landfills. The governor's plan, however, calls for 65 percent of chipping and composting, and 35 percent incineration. The first permit will be issued this week, Mr. Mapp said, followed by a second by the weekend.

If 65 percent of the debris is not chipped by February, Mr. Mapp said he would move forward with burning an even greater percentage of debris before the March 20 date. "The people of the Virgin Islands and the treasury of the VI will not be saddled with the bill," the governor said during the press briefing, adding that the government simply does not have the money to absorb the cost.

While senators approved the measure and as of Friday had enough votes to override a veto, no action has been taken by the governor, and he has a ten-day window before he vetoes it, to give him some more time for burning the debris without breaking the law. After ten days of no action, the measure becomes law. If Mr. Mapp vetoes the measure, however, say on the tenth day, the action would buy him a little more time before senators meet in another session to override his veto.

The governor said all e-waste, to include metal, will be shipped out of the territory. His decision to burn 35 percent of the debris while chipping and composting the remaining 65 percent, follows recommendations from a group of government officials from four departments called the "Debris Management Team". They include the commissioner of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Dawn Henry, the commissioner of the Department of Public Works, Nelson Petty, Jr., the commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, Carlos Robles, and Roger Merritt, Jr., executive director of the Waste Management Authority.

The governor said mahogany wood would not be burnt or chipped. Instead, he said, the wood will be stored by the government of the Virgin Islands, and later given to artisans. "They are assets, meaning they have value to the government and the people of the Virgin Islands," Mr. Mapp said of the mahogany.