

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Demonstration Of Debris Burning Takes Place Today On St. Croix

Environment / **Published On December 13, 2017 10:31 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **December 13, 2017**



ST. CROIX -- While Governor Kenneth Mapp did not give an exact day as to when the incineration of vegetative debris left behind by Hurricanes Irma and Maria would begin, Mr. Mapp said during his Monday press briefing that the process would commence sometime this week, and The Consortium has learned that a demonstration of the burning will take place today on the south shore of St. Croix. The demonstration, it must be noted, was not sanctioned by the Army Corps of Engineers.

As explained by The Consortium in multiple debris incineration stories, while members of the 32nd Legislature passed a measure banning burning of debris in the territory, the governor at the time had ten days to take action before the bill is enacted. On the eve of

the measure automatically becoming law, he could then move to veto the bill, which would send it back to the Senate where lawmakers would decide to either accept defeat or override Mr. Mapp's veto, a course of action Senate President Myron Jackson said would be employed by legislators. By then, however, Mr. Mapp would have already approved air-curtain incineration and lawmakers would have to mull whether to stall a process well underway, or move on.

The governor appears to have followed this exact playbook, telling the media at the Monday press briefing that while the bill banning the burning of debris in the territory has sat on his desk, he hadn't taken any action as of Monday, adding, "And I probably won't be acting favorably on it."

And the governor has stuck to his reasoning for burning, at last estimate, 35 percent of the 700,000 cubic yards of debris in the territory, contending that while the federal government has committed to cover 100 percent of the cost of ridding the islands of the hurricane-related debris, that window will be shut closed on March 20, 2018. "I'm not giving you anymore time, it's all on your dime," Mr. Mapp said would be the federal response if the territory fails to deal with the debris expediently.

Even so, lawmakers have not halted their calls for the governor to reconsider his decision. Senator Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, a chief proponent against burning, shared a letter [on her Facebook page](#) on Tuesday that she said was sent to the governor and officials of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. It again cites pollution caused by the burning of debris, and urges the governor, FEMA and the Army Corps of Engineers to reconsider their plan.

"We write today in vehement opposition to the proposed burning of wood debris and waste for additional information on the proposed burning of wood debris on St. Croix and St. Thomas. We received through a general alert system today noticed that such burning is going to commence soon. However, as you must know, the legislature of the Virgin Islands has passed a bill banning such activities that make this activity illegal," reads a portion of the letter on Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly's Facebook page. A bill, however, does not become law until it's either signed into law by the governor, takes effective automatically if no action is taken by the governor in ten days, or the Senate moves to override a governor's veto.

In a release issued to the media last week, Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly suggested that residents in the path of pollution caused by burning were being neglected. "This decision only considers cost; consequently, quality of life is secondary," she said. "I respectfully urge Governor Mapp to stand with the Legislature of the Virgin Islands to ban burning. Let us continue to put people first. People before money."

The governor, though, appeared on Monday immovable. Speaking of a meeting he hosted with Mr. Jackson and Mrs. Rivera-O'Reilly, who serves as vice president of the 32nd Legislature, Mr. Mapp said: "I think we came to a unified conclusion that there is such significant vegetation on the island that cannot be chipped, mulched and stored" that some burning will be necessary. And relative to pollution, the governor said the Environmental Protection Agency will be monitoring air quality to assure that pollution does not exceed accepted levels.

Correction: Dec. 13, 2017

A previous version of this article stated incorrectly that debris burning would commence today on St. Croix. However, while burning has been approved, what will take place today on the South Shore of St. Croix is a demonstration of the process. The story has been updated to reflect the correct information.

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