

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Burning Permits Have Been Issued, But USACE Says, 'We're Not Burning Anything Right Now'

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The Department of Planning and Natural Resources in a release issued Friday made known that it had issued the permits for the Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to conduct air curtain incineration of debris in the territory, but USACE says the potential operation is currently on hold, following the 32nd Legislature's override of Governor Kenneth Mapp's veto of a bill that banned burning of debris by the government in the territory, and a lawsuit.

"We're not burning anything right now," George Stringham, USACE's Recovery Field Office public affairs chief in the territory, told The Consortium Tuesday, even as he confirmed that permits had been issued. Mr. Stringham said he could not comment

further because of the lawsuit, and referred The Consortium to the Department of Justice.

According to D.P.N.R., the burning operation was approved for Estate Body Slob, St. Croix, which is located near the Kingshill Cemetery.

The 32nd Legislature, in a rebuke to Mr. Mapp and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, overrode Mr. Mapp's burning ban veto 12-2 [on December 21](#), disrupting the Mapp administration's and FEMA's plan to burn about 35 percent of the roughly 700,000 cubic yards of vegetative debris left behind by Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Senator Novelle Francis, who told The Consortium [that](#) he would not immediately participate in an override attempt, forsook his own words and joined with the majority in the override, stating that while he did not have a problem with some burning, he took issue with the locations where the burning would occur.

During the Dec. 21 session, senators highlighted the same reasons given during past Senate meetings discussing the ban, along with new ammunition from an Army Corps of Engineers video showing a [massive debris-mulching operation currently ongoing in PR](#). Senators favor mulching.

Throughout [#PuertoRico](#), a massive operation to remove more than 3 million cubic yards of debris churns on. Just outside of Ponce, the Recovery Field Office has established a bustling collection site in the El Tuque Quarry to collect vegetation, or veg, debris. ? : Patrick Loch
pic.twitter.com/kQJTCR2bMd

— USACE HQ (@USACEHQ) [December 5, 2017](#)

Mr. Mapp has not issued a statement following the veto override, but the governor has held to his position that some burning would be necessary if the territory intended to meet the March 20, 2018 deadline, after which the local government would have to foot the bill of ridding the territory of the debris. However, Senator Myron Jackson, who also serves as president of the 32nd Legislature, said Mr. Mapp was making too much of the deadline, adding that the local government could simply request an extension from the federal government.