

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Lobster, Conch And Other Seafood From St. Croix Getting 'Lost' In Puerto Rico Through Postal Service

Business / **Published On February 04, 2019 10:22 PM /**

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ST. CROIX -- St. Croix residents sending frozen seafood such as conch, lobster and other items to family and friends on the U.S. mainland have been confronted with a sudden growing problem: the packages, sent through the U.S. Postal Service, are getting "lost" in Puerto Rico, two U.S. Postal Service employees have confirmed to The Consortium.

One of the employees, whom The Consortium will not name, said since December 2018, fifteen packages with lobster and conch never made it out of Puerto Rico. This employee said one customer spent almost \$200 recently shipping conch and other seafood to his family, "and the last scan was in Puerto Rico," the employee said. Though the U.S.

Postal Service reimburses the cost of shipping if items get lost, it does not cover the cost of the goods.

It is unusual that so many seafood packages would simply get "lost" in Puerto Rico, and it is therefore a problem that the U.S. Postal Service should look into. However, the other Postal Service employee said that while the "lost" seafood was a problem, the bigger issue at hand is that the Postal Service's office in Puerto Rico which handles U.S. Virgin Islands mail, is supposed to scan the territory's mail that are stopped by Customs into the U.S.P.S. system, but the office, for years, has not done so.

This employee said while it's not a consistent occurrence, Customs sometimes hold frozen packages. On a number of occasions, Customs officers have found items that are not permitted to be shipped through the Postal Service. And because the goods are frozen, they oftentimes spoil during the holdup process and are therefore not shipped to their mainland destination. The Postal Service office in Puerto Rico responsible for scanning the items stopped by Customs is called the San Juan Processing and Distribution Center, located at 585 Ave. FD Roosevelt San Juan, Pr.

"The Post Office should have an employee scanning the packages in and out of Puerto Rico, and that's not being done," this Postal Service employee said. Because the items stopped by Customs are not scanned into the system, when residents visit local Postal Service branches inquiring of the seafood shipped Express Mail to the U.S. mainland, the Postal Service has no other choice but to reimburse the customer of the cost of shipment -- not the cost of the actual goods.

"The scan proves that law enforcement has it, and if it's not scanned, we have to reimburse," this employee said.

The problem, which is costing the Postal Service thousands of dollars, dates back years, and it's one that needs to be fixed, according to this employee.

Attempts to reach the office in San Juan responsible for scanning the mail were unsuccessful, as calls we placed to the office were not returned. And all inquiries relative to Postal Service operations in the U.S. Virgin Islands are routed to the U.S. mainland.

While there is little that Postal Service employees and even U.S.P.S. leadership in the territory can do about the problem, it's a task that Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett could undertake. Calls placed to Ms. Plaskett were not returned at time of writing.

The lost goods problem is not the only issue being faced by the Postal Service arm on St. Croix. [U.S.P.S. has been using International Express mailing forms to ship express mail to the U.S. mainland](#), a procedure, according to a source with direct knowledge of the matter, has caused long lines at post offices on St. Croix because the process is cumbersome and has added a greater workload on Postal Service employees.

Furthermore, the International Express Mail form stands to further confuse mainland businesses, many of whom already struggle with recognizing the U.S. Virgin Islands as part of the United States.