

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Three 737 Max 8 American Airlines Planes Servicing USVI Have Been Grounded, Tourism Confirms

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President Donald Trump, following mounting international pressure to ground Boeing's 737 Max 8 airplane in light of a crash on Sunday in Ethiopia, which came after an accident of the same model airplane in Indonesia in October, announced the grounding of the plane in the United States this afternoon.

The move came after the rest of the world had banned the airplane from flying based on new information gleaned from the Ethiopian Airlines crash via satellite-tracking data, which confirmed similarities between the Sunday crash and last year's. The incidents resulted in the combined deaths of 346 people from all parts of the world, including the Caribbean. The Federal Aviation Administration (F.A.A.), following Mr. Trump's order,

said it too had gathered new information from satellite data suggesting similarities between the accidents.

"The safety of the American people, of all people, is our paramount concern," Mr. Trump told reporters at the White House.

Governor Albert Bryan said in a Department of Tourism release issued Wednesday evening that he supported the decision. "Erring on the side of caution and ensuring the safety of Virgin Islands residents and travelers to the territory is our utmost priority," Mr. Bryan. "This Administration supports the decision to temporarily ground Boeing's 737 MAX. While this action may result in changes to normal flight operations and affect airlift, I have full confidence in our travel partner American Airlines to mobilize its assets and resume normal operations in a short period of time."

The grounding will remain in effect pending further investigation, including the examination of the flight-data and cockpit-voice recorders of an Ethiopian Airlines jet that crashed last weekend, the F.A.A. said.

Department of Tourism Commissioner Nominee, Joseph Boschulte, confirmed in the release that two American Airlines flights between St. Croix and Miami, and one of the two flights between St. Thomas and Miami are currently serviced by the 737 MAX 8 aircraft. Flights to and from the territory on other carriers and from other cities are currently not affected.

"Our team has been at the airport on St. Croix to work with passengers to ensure they have the information needed to make alternate plans," Mr. Boschulte said. He encouraged all travelers to check with their airlines to confirm travel plans before heading to the airport.

American Airlines flight 943 departed St. Thomas to Miami Wednesday afternoon, while the outbound Miami-St. Croix flight (AA 1293) was grounded at Henry E. Rohlsen Airport this afternoon. Wednesday evening's Miami-St. Croix service (AA 2317) has been cancelled and efforts are underway to secure another aircraft model to transport passengers to the mainland, D.O.T. said.