

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Under Fire For Water Problems Affecting Frederiksted, WAPA Mobilizes Contractors To Install Additional Pumps In Richmond, Concordia And Contentment

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With pressure mounting from the community and lawmakers alike, the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority on Thursday said it had taken steps to rectify the water problem that has plagued Frederiksted for a week. In a release issued this afternoon, the authority said it mobilized three contractors to install additional pumps at pumping stations in Richmond, Contentment and Concordia. The move came after WAPA said it suffered a temporary setback in the ongoing efforts to build a high enough water storage capacity at the Kingshill storage tank.

Community members have reached out to The Consortium to divulge what was described as unsanitary conditions bedeviling those affected. Senators Kurt Vialet and Alicia Barnes also called on the authority to do more. In a release issued today, Mr. Vialet requested that all pumps be overhauled or replaced, and that WAPA implement a plan of redundancy in the event a future problem occurs.

As vice-chair of the Senate Committee on Housing, Infrastructure and Telecommunications, Ms. Barnes on Wednesday recommended that Governor Albert Bryan immediately mobilize the Virgin Islands National Guard's Water Purification Unit to provide potable water to the affected residents.

"The governor in his capacity as commander in chief has the authority to mobilize the resources of the Virgin Islands National Guard in such instances," Ms. Barnes said.

She further recommended that WAPA take appropriate contingency steps to ensure that residents are not adversely impacted and that their basic need of reliable potable water service is met.

"At a minimum, local water haulers should be deployed to provide potable water to our critical infrastructure facilities such as schools, early child care establishments, health service providers, Senior and disabled citizens homes, etc. Additionally, in the true spirit of public/private partnering, Limetree Bay Terminals should also be contacted for available resources to bring relief to our residents," Ms. Barnes said.

In its release today, WAPA said service was compromised since Saturday morning when the Concordia pump station fell off line for several hours, and the storage capacity at Kingshill was significantly reduced. The Kingshill tank must achieve a storage level of 6-7 feet of water, about 700,000 gallons, in order to restore normal service from mid-island to the west of St. Croix, including Frederiksted town, the authority said.

"Earlier today, the water system on St. Croix suffered an unusual demand for service and within a five-hour period, the tank's capacity diminished from four feet to one foot," said WAPA Executive Director / CEO Lawrence Kupfer. "In an effort to fully validate the system, crews were once again deployed throughout the mid-island to west end areas to verify there was no loss of water volume through leaking lines."

He added, "Our crews inspected the system and found no compromises. We suspect an unusual demand may have occurred which significantly reduced our storage levels. Perhaps residents and business owners are using the limited water flow to refill cisterns and other water catchment facilities."

Mr. Kupfer sought to reassure the community that there is no shortage in the production of water on St. Croix, according to the release.

"We are only challenged by the ability to maintain adequate storage to effectively deliver potable water to the west end of the island," he said. By 1 p.m., Mr. Kupfer said, the five million gallon tank at Kingshill had regained three feet of water storage.,," he said. "I encourage residents and business owners to use only the volume of water they need, to allow for a continued building of storage capacity, so we can all benefit from the water service. The sooner we can get to a 6-7 foot level at Kingshill, then normal service will return to all of our customers. I also implore our customers to regularly conserve water."

"In light of this ongoing water service interruption, WAPA's emergency management response team remains activated and steering the service restoration effort. Components of the team met with the contractors earlier on Thursday, and mapped out a strategy to install the additional pumps at each of the pumping stations by this coming Monday morning (March 18)," Mr. Kupfer continued.

"The installations will bring to three, the number of pumps at Richmond, two at Contentment, and two at Concordia. Our objective with these installations is to increase water flow to Kingshill tank and build inventory even quicker than we are now seeing," he concluded.

Effective Thursday, the operating hours of the Richmond potable water standpipe is limited to five hours, from 4 pm – 9pm daily, until the water service interruption has been resolved.