

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Florida Man Arrested For Allegedly Forging, Cashing VI Port Authority Checks Totaling More Than \$90,000

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crime and law concept with police handcuffs on desk

ST. THOMAS -- A sub-contract worker from Florida employed to help with construction work at the Virgin Islands Port Authority (VIPA) was advised of his rights on grand larceny and related charges, the Department of Justice has announced.

Alain Rodriguez Rionda, 39, appeared before Magistrate Carolyn Hermon-Purcell Thursday morning for his initial court hearing after police executed an arrest warrant Wednesday and charged him with one count each of grand larceny, possession of stolen

property, forgery and obtaining money by false pretense in relation to the alleged theft of several of the Port Authority's checks, D.O.J. said.

Magistrate Hermon-Purcell found that there was probable cause to sustain all of the charges and to move the case forward. She set bail at \$250,000 and ordered Rionda to abide by a number of court-imposed bail conditions, which include being placed under 24-hour house arrest and surrendering his travel documents.

According to an affidavit in support of the arrest warrant filed by Det. Brian Bedminster of the Virgin Islands Police Department's Economic Crime Unit, on June 11, the Virgin Islands Port Authority filed a report of grand larceny with police, alleging that someone made off with several emergency VIPA Marine-Revenue checks that were stored in a filing cabinet in VIPA's administrative building. That building was damaged in the 2017 hurricanes and is currently being repaired by Lemartec Corporation, a Florida-based construction firm with operations in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Police learned that the stolen checks, totaling approximately \$93,000, were cashed and/or deposited into several Banco Popular and First Bank accounts. The stolen checks bore several names, including the defendant's, and persons who were identified as employees of Alpero, a company subcontracted by Lemartec to complete the roof repairs at the airport.

Police also interviewed three men who worked at a local grocery store and who frequently visited the bank to make deposits and cash the stolen checks. They reported that Rodriguez regularly came to the store to purchase items and to cash several handwritten VIPA Marine-Revenue checks. Investigations revealed that the store owners paid out to Rodriguez approximately \$90,000 in cash. Another store owner told police that Rodriguez came into the store and presented him with three handwritten VIPA Marine-Revenue checks in exchange for \$5,200 minus any service fees, Bedminster wrote.

Based on witnesses' statements and video surveillance footage, police arrested Rionda. He is scheduled to return to court on Aug. 8 for his arraignment hearing, at which he will formally answer to the charges.

Ms. George reminded the public that any person charged with a crime in the Virgin Islands is innocent until proven guilty by a court of competent jurisdiction.