

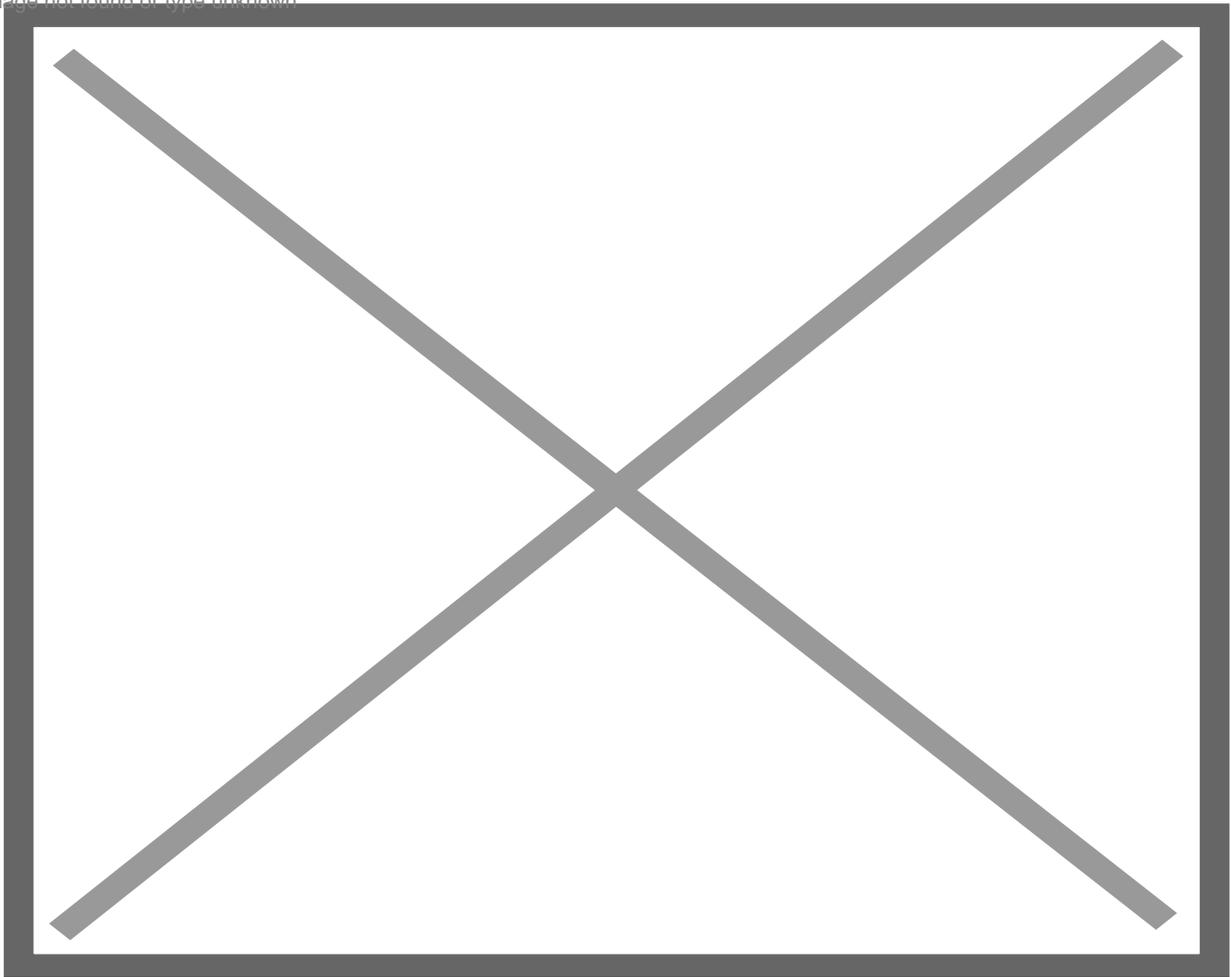
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Waste Haulers and Landfill Operators to Halt Garbage Collection Day Before Thanksgiving as Government Has Yet to Make Good on Promised Payments

Government / **Published On November 24, 2020 04:40 AM /**

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Bates Trucking headquarters in Peter's Rest, St. Croix By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM

USVI neighborhoods could become unpleasant sights to behold a day before Thanksgiving, as waste haulers and landfill operators — owed over \$24 million by the government of the Virgin Islands — halt garbage collection Wednesday in protest of nonpayment.

The planned strike represents a continuation in an on-again, off-again tug between the GVI and the waste haulers and landfill operators. In June, [a coordinated strike](#) was [called off](#) after the government made a swift payment of \$2 million to \$3 million. Nonetheless the owed funds still

remain extremely large at roughly \$24 million, down from the \$26 million owed for years after the last payment — straining the operations of garbage disposal companies as they must continue to make payroll and manage other costs.

What's more striking, however, is that the nonpayment to the companies appears to be an astonishing display of incompetence by the Waste Management Authority (WMA). In September, a bill sponsored by Senators Donna Frett-Gregory and Kurt Violet, which was subsequently signed into law by Governor Albert Bryan, [provided \\$15 million to WMA to pay Waste Haulers](#). But the authority, since that time, has yet to submit requisite documents to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) so that payments could be released to the waste haulers and landfill operators.

In an interview with the Consortium Monday night, Mr. Violet expressed frustration with the authority. "It shows you that it was never a money issue, it was an accountability issue where Waste Management cannot account for services rendered," Mr. Violet said. He said OMB has been waiting for invoices from WMA so that it could release an initial payment of \$9 million. The \$9 million figure is based on information provided by Waste Management, which said it could reconcile, for now, \$9 million in invoices immediately while it worked on providing documentation for the \$24 million owed in total. Yet WMA had yet to provide the documentation for the \$9 million as of Monday, leaving OMB impeded.

"It shows we have a serious issue within Waste Management that they are not able to reconcile anything," Mr. Violet said. "All they have to do is submit the invoices so the companies can be paid, so something has to be wrong."

He added, "I am totally disappointed that despite funding Waste Management to the tune of \$15 million, they can't reconcile their documents to pay the waste haulers that have been waiting years for payment."

James Bates, owner of Bates Trucking — one of the most recognizable waste collection and disposal firms in the territory — told the Consortium Monday night that the planned halt in garbage collection and disposal is a coordinated effort and would take effect Wednesday.

"They got the \$15 million for a while now and we haven't gotten a cent out of it yet," said Mr. Bates. "We gave the government a break and continued working. They asked us to hold off, we held off. They appropriated the money and now we're not getting paid." Bates Trucking on St. Croix serves about 95 percent of the housing communities on the island and roughly 3,500 homes.

A frustrated Violet continued, "It's time for people to do their jobs and be held accountable. And if you're not accountable, the Waste Management board needs to take appropriate action, and if not, the board needs to be sent home for cause."

Thanksgiving is one of the most celebrated traditions in America, including the USVI, which sees family and friends coming together. It also produces a lot of waste, as the tradition is marked by dining. To experience a halt in garbage collection a day before the holiday would spell disaster.