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## Disaster Averted: Waste Management to Pay at Least \$10 million to Waste Haulers and Landfill Operators by Dec. 4

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Following the [threats of a strike](#) on the eve of Thanksgiving by waste haulers and landfill operators, the Waste Management Authority scrambled to make good on millions of dollars owed to the companies to avert what would have been an unpleasant sight throughout neighborhoods in the territory.

WMA Executive Director Roger Merritt met with waste haulers and landfill operators Tuesday and said a payment of more than \$10 million would be distributed among the companies no later than Dec. 4, according to James Bates, owner of Bates Trucking, which serves 95 percent of housing communities on St. Croix and roughly 3,500 homes.

The agreement could not come at a better time for the companies, Mr. Bates said, revealing that many owners of these companies were operating on thin budgets. He said as a result of the nonpayments, at least one company could not afford to pay its employees and could not maintain trucks in need of new parts.

"He can't continue like this," Mr. Bates said of the company owner. Turning to himself, he added, "I can't continue like this."

The Waste Management Authority owes waste haulers and landfill operators about \$24 million for work performed over the years. In a statement issued late Tuesday following the Consortium's reporting on the matter, the authority appeared to argue that it was within the timeframe to remit payments set by a law that provides \$15 million to pay the companies. A bill sponsored by Senators Donna Frett-Gregory and Kurt Violet, and subsequently signed into law by Governor Albert Bryan, [made the funding possible](#).

Late Monday, Mr. Violet expressed disappointment that yet another strike was looming because of what appeared to be incompetence.

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

Ms. Frett-Gregory on Tuesday called on Governor Bryan to intervene. "It's unfortunate that our waste haulers only get attention when they halt collections," she stated. "These are hard working men with families to support who come out everyday to make sure our trash is picked up."