

logo not found or type unknown

Fire Truck is Said to Have Lost Power and Brakes While Heading Down Hill in St. John; Fire Director Says Investigation Ongoing

Accidents / **Published On November 24, 2021 06:41 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **November 24, 2021**

Image not found or type unknown



A V.I. Fire Service fire truck (not truck involved in accident)

ST. JOHN — The fire truck that was traveling down "one of the most dangerous hills in Coral Bay" was not responding when the driver applied brakes, leading to the deadly crash resulting in the death of Fireman Kasey Callwood.

That's according to V.I. Fire Service Director Daryl George, who said the information was preliminary and that it was provided by the other firefighter and fire truck driver who was injured during the Monday accident.

"He was coming down that hill and he said the truck lost power and it had no brakes and he lost control of the truck. Before it went over the ravine he tried to get the truck turned, the truck flipped causing the accident," Mr. George said. He said the driver hasn't been able to provide a full statement as he was still receiving medical care. "He had a bad head injury and was in and out," the director said.

This information was provided to the Consortium after the publication shared reports it received that firefighters have long complained about the state of the fire trucks. The vehicles' poor condition is exacerbated by a lack of maintenance, as the V.I. Fire Service has only one mechanic on staff for the St. Thomas-St. John District, and one for St. Croix.

Reports of the two firemen involved in the accident being trainees also frustrated community members who contended an experienced firefighter should have been in the vehicle. Mr. George said the practice was in compliance with the Fire Service's guidelines, and that the Fire Service has been affected by a shortage of personnel as many left when [60 percent of employees became eligible to retire](#).

"Yes, it's a practice for us to have rookies driving because we're short staffed. It's no excuse, but again, these are the individuals who we hire to do the job and we have the best trainers as the supervisors do every week to train these individuals," the director said.

On concerns that the fire trucks are being operated without proper safety checks, Mr. George stated, "All our trucks are maintained by our maintenance division. Once the firefighters check the trucks in the morning and there's a discrepancy with the trucks, the trucks are taken offline for maintenance." He said every morning fire fighters are given a check sheet, "and if they come to us and tell us this truck is not working, we take it offline, and we do whatever maintenance is needed." A copy of a checklist provided to firefighters daily was viewed by the Consortium.

The two firefighters who were part of the accident joined V.I.F.S. in 2019, according to Mr. George. He said it was not the first time they had operated the vehicle.

The director also said he recently put in requests for two mechanic hires, one for each district. He spoke of a new fire truck on St. Croix that replaced one [damaged after an accident](#), and said new trucks were being ordered for the St. Thomas-St. John District with \$1.5 million. "It's not like something we're not trying to do," Mr. George said referring to getting new vehicles for the Fire Service. "It takes time; these trucks take six to eight months to build."

During a Tuesday press conference, both Mr. George and Fire Chief David Hodge became emotional while talking about the incident. "Right now the families of these firefighters need your support. All the firefighters just need your support," Chief Hodge said.

Also on Tuesday, Governor Albert Bryan ordered that all Virgin Islands flags in the territory be flown at half-mast in honor of Mr. Callwood.