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With St. Croix Consuming 2.8 Million Gallons of Water Daily, WAPA Implements Mitigation Strategies to Contain Sargassum Problem Affecting Production

WAPA / **Published On July 25, 2022 06:14 AM /**

Staff Consortium **July 25, 2022**

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Sargassum on beach. By. GETTY IMAGES

The V.I. Water and Power Authority said Sunday it is taking steps to contain the sargassum problem affecting water production on St. Croix, with the island consuming between 2.7 and 2.8 million gallons of water daily.

The authority said the desalination facility located next to the Richmond Power Plant in Christiansted and operated by WAPA's long-standing partner Seven Seas, has been impacted by the sargassum.

Seven Seas produces potable water from sea water via reverse osmosis water plants on St. Croix and St. Thomas. Potable water consumption on St. Croix averages 2.7 – 2.8 million gallons per day, and Seven Seas can produce a maximum of 3.7 million gallons per day, the authority made known. The influx of sargassum impacts the water plant in a number of ways, for example blocking intake screens and clogging strainers and filters.

According to the release, WAPA and Seven Seas have been working around the clock to ensure sustained water production. "While production continues to exceed demand, the increase in sargassum has impacted the facility's efficiency and reduced its production capacity. As a result, Seven Seas and the Authority have expeditiously implemented several strategies to help manage the volume of sargassum," WAPA said.

These action items include frequent filter changes, constant cleaning and monitoring of seawater intake to prevent blockage, physical removal of debris, and installation of deflection booms. These efforts have proven to be successful as there has been a notable increase in water production over the past 48 hours, according to the release.

In addition to the efforts mentioned, WAPA said it has increased its regular testing of potable water to ensure it continues to meet approved Environmental Protection Agency water quality standards. The authority has also increased the amount of water treatment and conditioning to maintain water quality, the release stated. "While EPA safe drinking water standards have been and will continue to be met, the public may experience instances of unfamiliar odor or colors in the water because of the sargassum in the sea water intake that the water plant is processing," the utility said.

WAPA said it will continue to diligently monitor and evaluate the sargassum situation as it evolves because additional sargassum is forecast to affect the territory within the coming months. "The Authority also continues to work with VITEMA and all its local and federal partners to not only mitigate the current situation, but also develop long-term solutions. Currently, based on present conditions, water production in the St. Thomas/St. John district remains unaffected," stated the release.