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New Environmental Crimes Task Force Launched in Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands

Environment / **Published On May 17, 2023 06:03 PM /**

Staff Consortium **May 17, 2023**

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The United States Justice Department has formally announced the commencement of the Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands Environmental Crimes Task Force.

This innovative task force is designed to investigate and prosecute offenses against federal laws designed to protect the environment, wildlife, and human health. Additionally, it will tackle issues of fraud, waste, and abuse within these regions.

This new initiative follows the Justice Department's Comprehensive Environmental Justice Enforcement Strategy announced a year ago. This strategy led to the establishment of the Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ) within the Environment and Natural Resources Division (ENRD).

"All communities deserve clean air, clean water, and the robust protection of their natural resources – both today and for future generations," stated Assistant Attorney General Todd Kim of the Justice Department's Environment and Natural Resources Division. The launch of the task force reiterates the department's dedication to environmental justice and its comprehensive plan to address the critical issues faced by communities overburdened with pollution.

U.S. Attorney W. Stephen Muldrow for the District of Puerto Rico emphasized that ensuring a healthy environment for all residents of Puerto Rico, free from hazardous waste and other pollutants, is a top priority for the U.S. Attorney's Office and the Justice Department. He noted that the new task force would combine resources from numerous federal agencies to enforce civil and criminal environmental laws aggressively.

Echoing Muldrow's sentiments, U.S. Attorney Delia Smith for the USVI stated that her office, along with their federal and local partners, is committed to enforcing environmental laws to protect citizens from environmental and health hazards and ensure equal access to a healthy environment for all.

The task force combines federal law enforcement agencies in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, including departments like the Army's Criminal Investigation Division, the Department of Agriculture's Office of Inspector General, the Environmental Protection Agency's Criminal Investigation Division, and many others.

The task force's creation expands upon the Justice Department's environmental justice strategy, providing a roadmap for employing the Justice Department's civil and criminal enforcement authorities and tools.

Under this strategy, the department aims to advance environmental justice in underserved communities, including low-income communities, communities of color, and Tribal and Indigenous communities.

In a bid to ensure public safety and environmental integrity, U.S. Attorney Muldrow and U.S. Smith have urged residents of Puerto Rico and USVI to report violations to federal agencies. Detailed contact information for various types of violations, including air quality, water pollution, waste management, wildlife harm, and more, has been made readily available for the public.

In cases of violations related to air quality, health, water, land, waste, chemicals and toxins, and cleanup, citizens are urged to contact the Environmental Protection Agency. Similarly, different federal departments should be contacted depending on the type of violation.

For more information, visit the U.S. Justice Department's official website.