

The Virgin Islands Consortium

107 Solar Panels Stolen, Air Conditioners Wrecked: Dept. of Education Calls for Public Assistance in Response to Recent Crimes Against School Resources

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107 solar panels were stolen from the St. Croix Educational Complex High School, according to Dept. of Education officials. The panels were purposed to sustain and modernize the island's school infrastructure. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM

V.I. Dept. of Education Commissioner Dionne Wells-Hedrington on Saturday made a public appeal for support following a recent spree of theft and vandalism impacting the department's ongoing projects. The criminal acts, described as "senseless, brazen, and unfortunate," have significantly disrupted preparations for the 2023-2024 school year, the commissioner said.

Over the past few days, Education officials have reported multiple incidents, which included destruction of air conditioning units stored in the department's procurement warehouse on St. Thomas for their copper coil cores. Meanwhile, at the Charlotte Amalie High School demolition site, also on St. Thomas, windows and other construction equipment meant for the site have gone missing.

"These thefts and acts of vandalism are not merely destructive, they strike at the heart of our efforts to equip schools with the resources they need to prepare for the upcoming school year," said Wells-Hedrington.

According to the department, the crimes weren't limited to St. Thomas. Over on St. Croix, an astonishing 107 solar panels were taken from the Educational Complex High School. These panels, part of an energy-efficient project backed by the V.I. Energy Office, were purposed to sustain and modernize the island's school infrastructure.

"These resources, which were designated for schools in the St. Thomas/St. John District and St. Croix District, have been damaged and stolen with just a month left before the new school year begins," the commissioner said. "These actions do a grave disservice to our students by depriving them of necessary classroom and campus resources."

While the Department of Education is preparing for the upcoming academic year, it acknowledges the need for the community's support in their ongoing investigations to apprehend the culprits.

"The recovery of these resources is our highest priority as they are key to improving our infrastructure, creating an environment that is conducive to learning," said Wells-Hedrington. "We urge the public to remain vigilant, keep an eye out for any suspicious activities near school campuses, and immediately report any related information to 911."