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Governor Bryan and VITEMA Director Jaschen Urge Residents to Prepare for Impending Storm and Provide Updates on St. Croix Potable Water Crisis

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS – In his second briefing from Government House this week, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. on Thursday stressed the importance of being prepared in light of three urgent issues that have surfaced in the Territory -- the water situation in St. Croix, a pending storm, and the Bonnie G, which ran aground off the coast of St. Thomas on Oct. 4, and has now become an imminent environmental threat due to expected wind and high seas.

“As we all know, Mother Nature has a way of reminding us of her intense power, so it is with a grave sense of urgency that I come before you again this week to share the latest information that we have,” Governor Bryan said, warning residents to anticipate adverse weather conditions.

VITEMA Director Daryl Jaschen provided an update on Tropical Storm Tammy, which is in the Atlantic and forecast to move toward the west-northwest through tonight, moving over the Leeward Islands Friday and Saturday, with maximum sustained winds near 60 mph.

Jaschen said rainfall totals of 1 to 2 inches, with maximum amounts up to 4 inches, are expected for the British and U.S. Virgin Islands into eastern Puerto Rico. These rains may produce isolated flash and urban flooding, along with isolated mudslides in areas of higher terrain. There are no Tropical Storm or Hurricane warnings for the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Governor Bryan addressed the ongoing water quality situation in Estates Diamond, Castle Burke, Colquhoun, , and Mon Bijou in St. Croix, where elevated levels of lead and copper were found in samples taken in these areas.

Governor Bryan explained that a time and work-intensive process of flushing water lines is being conducted neighborhood by neighborhood. All of the water lines in the affected areas that are not in use and where water may have stood stagnant for the last 30 days are being flushed, he said, noting the importance of flushing the system before more testing is conducted. Concurrently, additional testing is underway to provide additional information on next steps.

Testing requires the isolation and sealing of each faucet or tap for at least 6 hours before samples are taken, Governor Bryan said. Once samples are taken, they are hand delivered to laboratories in Puerto Rico. The lab protocols require two to three days for results, which means initial reports are anticipated by late Sunday or Monday, depending on the weather.

Sampling has been completed at the John H. Woodson, Alfredo Andrews, St. Croix Educational Complex, and in the Mount Pleasant Housing Community.

“I want to stress that we have never found lead in our water before and there are no lead pipes to our knowledge in the entire system,” Governor Bryan said. “This gives us a reasonable level of assurance that we don’t have a long-standing problem, if any, and that is why retesting is so important.”

Governor Bryan stressed the importance of staying prepared in unpredictable times. The places where no lead was found will also be retested, just to make sure that residents remain safe. The Water and Power Authority (WAPA) is working closely with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) to retest water samples.

“I encourage everyone to support one another, stay vigilant, and stay informed. The strength of the Virgin Islands has always been its people, and together, we can weather any storm,” Governor Bryan said.

There are two Department of Health hotlines available for residents to call from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday with health concerns related to lead in potable water and lead testing. Individuals may call 340-712-6299 or 340-776-1519. The Department of Planning and Natural Resources also operates a hotline number, 340-514-3666, Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The Department of Health advises the community that testing for lead exposure is available at the Frederiksted Health Center on St. Croix and the St. Thomas East End Medical Center at Tutu Park Mall on St. Thomas.

The Bryan-Roach Administration is investing in the Territory’s people, infrastructure, and future through transparency, stabilizing the economy, restoring trust in the government and ensuring that recovery projects are completed as quickly as possible. Visit transparency.vi.gov

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