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Governor Bryan Declares State of Emergency To Mitigate Impact of Sargassum Inundation on Territory

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS — Governor Albert Bryan Jr. issued an Executive Order declaring a State of Emergency in the Territory to mitigate the impact from the unusually high amounts of Sargassum seaweed piling up on USVI shores and having a negative impact on water-production capabilities on St. Croix.

Governor Bryan also has sent a request to the Biden Administration to declare a federal emergency on St. Croix regarding the Sargassum inundation, and teams from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) are expected to be on the ground in the Territory on Sunday, July 24, to assist the Government of the Virgin Islands (GVI) in coordinating a response.

Because of the Sargassum build-up, maintenance efforts have increased to keep the water intake for the desalinization plant on St. Croix clear from seaweed and biological debris resulting from the ecosystems associated with large Sargassum blooms. In addition, reduced water production could also create a negative effect on the V.I. Water and Power Authority's power-generating capacity.

While there currently are no negative impacts regarding public health resulting from the Sargassum build-up, Governor Bryan is advising residents of St. Croix to conserve water as the GVI takes steps to resolve the issues caused by the seaweed.

"I want to assure St. Croix that we don't anticipate any impact on public health from this annual invasion of Sargassum in our waters, including the stench that we all, unfortunately, have learned to live with every summer," Governor Bryan said. "However, the seaweed overrunning our beaches also brings the potential for disruption to businesses and other negative financial impacts to our economy. I have assembled a team that includes primary public agencies, including Health, DPNR and VITEMA, and the semiautonomous agencies that have been meeting to coordinate efforts with FEMA and other federal partners."

The Executive Order that Governor Bryan issued designates Department of Planning and Natural Resources Commissioner Jean-Pierre Oriol as the incident commander and directs VITEMA to activate the Emergency Operation Centers; directs the Department of Licensing and Consumer Affairs to institute relevant price freezes on certain goods and services; directs all agencies under the direction of the Governor to fully cooperate with DPNR's efforts; and suspends certain procurement requirements relevant to mitigating the issue.

While the immediate threat from the Sargassum is specific to St. Croix, pre-emptive efforts also are underway on St. Thomas to prevent adverse impacts to water-production capabilities in that district.

DPNR is monitoring the National Oceanography and Atmospheric Administration's Caribbean Coastal Ocean Observing System to track and forecast Sargassum blooms and potential impacts, and the seaweed is forecast to affect Caribbean waters into mid-October.

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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