



GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES



DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CLIMATE CHANGE IS DESTROYING OUR CORAL REEFS HERE'S WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

Commissioner Jean-Pierre L. Oriol of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources advises the community that the recent heat and rise in ocean temperatures around the Territory and region are higher than normal, thereby leading to an increase in coral bleaching.

When temperatures rise, corals begin to stress and can turn pale or even stark white in color. This process is called coral bleaching. Bleached corals are vulnerable to disease and starvation. Stress and disease can cause corals to have lesions, spots, or tissue loss. If the water stays warm for too long, these corals can die. If the temperature drops back down in time, the corals can often recover.

“Unfortunately, we can’t instantly turn down the thermostat on the ocean, but there are things we can do to reduce other man-made stressors to the reefs” noted Commissioner Oriol. Man-made stressors including runoff and other sources of pollution, overfishing, over-use of reef areas and the introduction of invasive species are all impacting corals on top of the thermal stress they are already experiencing.

DPNR urges the community to do its part to protect our coral reefs, particularly in this stressful time by reducing the stressors that we can control:

Keep your distance: do not touch, stand or anchor on reefs; practice good buoyancy when scuba diving and keep space between you and the reef;

Keep pollution out of our waters: use mineral sunscreens without oxybenzone, clean-up debris that can make its way into the coastal environment, and prevent dirt and silt from washing into the ocean by having sediment and erosion control devices properly installed on construction sites.

Let fish help our corals: reef fish eat algae that can overgrow our corals, so avoid fishing for parrotfish, surgeonfish and other plant eating fishes.

Report what you see: When you swim, dive or snorkel take note of how the corals look; contact the appropriate agencies with an update on the reefs near you. Pictures are the most helpful.

To learn more about what you can do to reduce your impact on the coral reef contact CZM Education & Outreach Coordinator, Kitty Edwards at (340) 774-3320 or email at Kristina.edwards@dpr.vi.gov

For information on the BleachWatch program and how to receive trainings and updates contact Lisa Terry, The Nature Conservancy, lisa.terry@tnc.org, visit www.reefconnect.org/bleachwatch or download the BleachWatch VI app