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Unified Command Updates 35th Legislature on St. Croix Water Quality

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS – Representatives of VI Government agencies who make up the St. Croix Water Quality Unified Command provided updates Friday during the 35th Legislature’s Committee of the Whole.

Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) Commissioner Jean-Pierre Oriol, Water and Power Authority (WAPA) Chief Executive Officer Andrew Smith, Acting Health Commissioner Dr. Nicole Craigwell-Syms, VI Housing Authority Director Lydia Pelle and Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) Assistant Director Steve Deblasio provided details on community outreach and actions to mitigate the effects of lead and copper found in drinking water on St. Croix.

While senators probed the testifiers on the origin of elevated lead and copper levels found last month in samples taken from St. Croix’s potable water supply, the Department of Health released favorable results from lead exposure testing of young children that was conducted last week. Results from the pediatric lead testing of 64 Alfredo Andrews Elementary School students in Granny Pre-K, first and second grade all returned negative for lead in the blood. Children under the age of six are still developing rapidly, and lead exposure can adversely affect their brain, nervous system, growth, development, and overall behavior.

Commissioner Oriol said replacing aged water distribution lines and installing corrosion control components will be the key to reducing lead and copper found in WAPA’s potable water system. The problem, Oriol said, is not with Seven Seas Water, which WAPA contracts to supply its standpipes. Seven Seas Chief Executive Officer Henry J. Charrabe, who also testified on Friday, characterized Seven Seas’ drinking water as being of “exceptional” quality.

WAPA CEO Andrew Smith said plans are being made to provide St. Croix residents with free water filters. Additionally, Smith said WAPA is working with Government House on the logistics of issuing a retroactive bill credit to affected WAPA customers.

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