

# **Virgin Islands Housing Authority**

*Testimony to*

**35<sup>th</sup> Legislature of the Virgin Islands**

**COMMITTEE ON THE WHOLE**

**Water and Power Authority's St. Croix Potable Water System**



**VIRGIN ISLANDS HOUSING AUTHORITY**

*Housing the People of Paradise*

Testimony By:

**Lydia Pelle**

Chief Operating Officer

on

November 3, 2023

## COMMITTEE ON THE WHOLE

Water and Power Authority's St. Croix Potable Water System

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Good Morning Honorable Senator President Novelle E. Francis, Jr., Chairman, Committee of the Whole and other Committee Members in attendance.

I am Lydia Pelle, Chief Operating Officer of the Virgin Islands Housing Authority, I will be giving testimony on behalf of Mr. Robert Graham, our Executive Director, who could not be here today.

This testimony is in regard to the ongoing crisis of the Water and Power Authority's potable water system of discolored water and the recent findings of elevated lead and copper levels, as it affects the public housing communities on St. Croix.

The Virgin Islands Housing Authority began participating in VITEMA's WAPA Water Quality Unified Command Meeting on Tuesday, October 17, 2023. At that meeting, VIHA was informed of the water testing results conducted by EPA regarding elevated lead and copper levels. Of the areas affected by this testing, and out of caution because it was on the borderline of the area of concern, the Mount Pleasant Community was included as one of the testing sites. Our Mount Pleasant Housing Community is a site that includes 2 buildings, 44 residential units and approximately 63 residents.

On October 27, 2023, the Virgin Islands Housing Authority received official notification from the Department of Planning and Natural Resources stating the following:

*"The Virgin Islands Department of Planning & Natural Resources (DPNR), in conjunction with the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (WAPA), conducted surveillance lead (Pb) and copper (Cu) sampling at the Mt. Pleasant Housing Complex on St. Croix on Thursday October 19, 2023 in response to the preliminary sampling that took place between October 2-5, 2023 where samples showed elevated levels of lead and copper. As per DPNR's official notification to VIHA, the results indicate that the samples taken at the Mount Pleasant Housing Complex for lead and copper are significantly below the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Action Levels. The lead & copper monitoring requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) established the Action Levels of 0.015 mg/L (15ppb) for lead and 1.3 mg/L (1300 ppb) copper; the results for the Mt. Pleasant Housing Complex were < 0.0010 mg/L (< 1 ppb) and 0.002 mg/L (2 ppb) for copper. Therefore, the samples collected at Mount Pleasant demonstrate that the water meets EPA Safe Drinking Water standards and is safe for cooking/consumption. We continue to recommend that water be run/flushed for at least one minute as a precautionary measure..."*

As such, the Virgin Islands Housing Authority issued notification to its residents of the Mount Pleasant Housing community on Tuesday, October 31, 2023, which informed them that the lead and copper test results met the EPA's Safe Drinking Water standards and is safe for cooking and consumption, but they should continue to run the water for 1 minute before using as a precautionary measure.

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To this end, VIHA continues to participate in VITEMA's Command and Staff Meeting – St. Croix Water Quality calls on a daily basis, but at this time sees no need to implement any additional mitigation measures to protect the residents of Mount Pleasant Housing Complex. Accordingly, VIHA will defer to VITEMA's WAPA Water Quality Unified Command for updates and direction as we collectively address this water crisis.

On a broader note, VIHA expects to receive additional testing results for all its public housing communities on the island of St. Croix as a part of the overall island testing and analysis being conducted by the Department of Planning & Natural Resources and the Water and Power Authority in light of this Local State of Emergency. Once test results are received and the recommendations from these regulatory agencies are made, VIHA stands ready to ensure the health and safety of the residents of its public housing communities is addressed immediately and in any way necessary.

I am available for any questions regarding this testimony.

Thank you.