



**TESTIMONY FOR THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS,
VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND CONSUMER PROTECTION**

VIRGIN ISLANDS WASTE MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

36TH LEGISLATURE OF THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2025

10:30 A.M.

**HANNIBAL “MIKE” WARE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
VIRGIN ISLANDS WASTE MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY**

Good morning, Chairperson Lewis, members of the Committee, and the listening public, I am Hannibal “Mike” Ware, the Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority (VIWMA). Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to address the current state of waste management in the United States Virgin Islands. Your continued oversight and engagement are critical as we work together to confront challenges that have been accumulating over decades and now demand urgent, coordinated action.

The U.S. Virgin Islands is facing a defining moment in its waste management history. Our system, stretched far beyond its intended capacity, is now in crisis. This is not a recent development nor the result of a single failure. It is the culmination of long-standing structural issues, historical underinvestment, and aging infrastructure—conditions that have left us with limited room for error. The former Interim Executive Director briefed this body just months ago about many of these concerns. Less than two full months into the job as the new Executive Director, I can report that those circumstances remain fundamentally unchanged, although we have made progress in several decisive areas that I will outline today.

I intend to provide you with a thorough, transparent account of the operational, environmental, financial, and regulatory landscape surrounding both our solid waste and wastewater divisions. I will also share the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority’s plans, priorities, and ongoing projects designed to stabilize our system, modernize our infrastructure, and restore public trust.

Historical and Systemic Context

The challenges before us are not sudden or accidental. The territory’s waste management system has been hampered for decades by historical underinvestment, aging and crumbling infrastructure, and systemic challenges that can no longer be deferred. These historical issues have resulted in repeated lapses in environmental compliance, operational inefficiencies, and increasing regulatory oversight from federal agencies.

Our landfills have long operated at or near capacity. Our wastewater collection systems—many of them built in the 1960s and 1970s—are collapsing, failing, and in need of total replacement. While our employees work tirelessly under difficult conditions, their efforts alone cannot compensate for infrastructure that has long outlived its useful life.

The Authority has also been constrained by a funding structure that never materialized as envisioned. Revenue streams contemplated in VIWMA's enabling legislation remain unimplemented, leaving the Authority dependent on appropriations that are frequently delayed or, at times, never transferred. This results in systemic financial instability that prevents long-term planning and slows our response to emergencies, not to mention hindering our ability to remain current on our vendor payments.

Solid Waste Division: Current Conditions and Risks

The most visible stress points in our system involve our landfill facilities. Across the territory, each site is at a critical juncture.

Anguilla Landfill – St. Croix

The Anguilla Landfill, operating under a federal consent decree, is nearing the limits of its capacity. The 2013 consent order required Anguilla to stop accepting waste by 2018 and complete closure construction by June 30, 2020. Those deadlines were not met, and the urgency for closure has only grown.

To address this, VIWMA has secured \$46 million in CDBG-DR funding to close three-quarters of the landfill while expanding the remaining quarter. This expansion will give us approximately five additional years of operational capacity while we design and site a new landfill for St. Croix. Public engagement on potential new locations will begin in January 2026.

In September 2025, VIWMA and The Virgin Islands Port Authority executed a long-overdue lease agreement for the Anguilla site, which removes a longstanding barrier to project advancement. This is an essential milestone on the path toward compliance.

Bovoni Landfill – St. Thomas

The Bovoni Landfill is also nearing full capacity and remains subject to extensive federal compliance requirements. We are advancing the Bovoni Landfill Expansion and Closure Project to increase disposal capacity and meet long-term environmental obligations. This effort

includes design and construction of a mechanically stabilized earth wall, landfill expansions, closure work, and major infrastructure improvements.

Bovoni has reached a point where additional surrounding property must be acquired to ensure safe operations. We are preparing to utilize the western portion of the landfill and fill it to final grade as part of the phased closure approach. We are also increasing monitoring frequency to meet environmental standards and supporting the development of a new fill progression strategy that ensures compliance with federal requirements.

The Authority has applied for Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) Grant – Tranche 3 funding, as allocated in the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority (VIFA) Community Development Block Grant – Mitigation (CDBG-MIT) Action Plan, to support the development of the new St. Croix Landfill and the Bovoni Landfill Expansion Project. These applications are currently under review by VIHFA. The previous MIT Action Plan allocated \$100 million combined for both projects, but the VIHFA is working on reducing these amounts because of funding constraints. The Authority is imploring everyone that we require the full amount to address these major crisis issues.

Susannaberg Transfer Station – St. John

The Susannaberg facility functions solely as a transfer station, meaning all waste must be hauled off-island for final disposal. This arrangement adds considerable operational and financial strain and reduces resilience in emergencies. The long-term strategy for St. John must include more efficient handling and processing options to reduce both cost and risk.

Consent Decree Efforts and Vegetative Waste Program

Both Anguilla and Bovoni remain under consent decrees, and the Authority continues to advance required actions in close coordination with federal regulators. One significant component of our compliance strategy is the new Vegetative Waste Management Program.

This program is designed to reduce the volume of green waste entering our landfills, thereby preserving valuable airspace. By introducing mechanical size reduction, mulching, and

beneficial reuse practices, we can lower disposal volumes, reduce operational burdens, and support local agriculture.

To initiate this program, we will procure key equipment, including a horizontal grinder, trommel screen, and excavator. Funding is expected from grant programs. The mulch produced will be available to the Department of Agriculture for distribution to farmers and landscapers. We anticipate the program becoming operational by the end of summer 2026.

Illegal Dumping and Compliance Challenges

Illegal dumping remains a persistent problem. Tires, used oil, white goods, and construction debris continue to appear in remote areas, creating environmental and public health hazards. These issues are compounded by outdated equipment and a heavy reliance on rented machinery, which increases operational costs and reduces flexibility.

The Authority is pursuing measures to increase enforcement, expand surveillance, and strengthen penalties, but legislative support will be essential to addressing this problem effectively.

Progress Toward Modernized Operations

Estate Mon Bijou, Estate Concordia, and Estate Cotton Valley Projects

VIWMA has received Notices to Proceed for the St. Croix Convenience Centers under the CDBG-DR Grant – Tranche 2. Architectural and Engineering (A&E) design work has commenced for all three sites. The full design is anticipated to be completed by December 2025, with a target construction start date of January 2026.

Red Hook Convenience Center Project

The application for the Red Hook Convenience Center has been approved and is currently in the final stage of environmental review. Because the proposed site is located within Flood Zone A and a 100-year floodplain, the project must undergo an eight-step Environmental Review Process. The Contractor recently completed the Environmental Assessment and the Authority

will proceed with obtaining Federal Consistency Determination (FCD) approval from the Department of Planning & Natural Resources (DPNR).

Bournefield and Susannaberg Transfer Station Upgrades

The VIHFA has approved the Bournefield and Susannaberg Transfer Station Upgrade applications. VIHFA is preparing the Project Agreements and Notices to Proceed, which will initiate the environmental assessment phase. Meanwhile, VIWMA is coordinating with DPNR to secure Federal Consistency Determination (FCD) approval and finalize the purchase agreement with Virgin Islands Housing Authority (VIHA) for the Bournefield site.

Increased Door-to-Door Collection

We have obtained a \$350,000 grant to support the purchase of two rear-loader trucks for a St. Thomas pilot program to provide door-to-door trash collection services to neighborhoods with tight turnarounds and narrow roads. Across both districts, we are transitioning toward expanded house-to-house collection to reduce reliance on bin sites and minimize illegal dumping.

In partnership with the University of the Virgin Islands, we are developing the Integrated Sustainable Materials Management Plan, a roadmap for strategic waste diversion, resource recovery, and infrastructure planning. This plan will identify material-specific strategies, recommend policy reforms, and guide resource investments. It is expected to be completed in April 2026.

Our team also recently observed an Air Curtain Burner demonstration in Florida. This technology offers major benefits for disaster debris management, fire risk mitigation, and landfill airspace conservation. The ability to reduce vegetative debris by up to 98 percent while producing a beneficial biochar product makes it a promising option for our system, especially after major storms. It is currently illegal for us to burn green waste produced by storms or any natural disaster. The Authority will ask the Legislature to consider amending these restrictions while simultaneously addressing the concerns of citizens.

Wastewater Division: Infrastructure, Consent Decree, and Optimization

As if our solid waste challenges were not serious enough, the territory's wastewater system presents an equally urgent set of risks and obligations. The Wastewater Division contends with daily crises driven by severely deteriorated infrastructure—much of which is long past its useful life and requires complete replacement. As a result, we experience frequent pipe blockages and system failures that lead to sewage entering our streets, neighborhoods, and coastal waters. These conditions pose undeniable environmental and public health hazards. Without sustained mitigation efforts and a comprehensive overhaul of our wastewater infrastructure, these risks will only continue to escalate.

To chart a path forward, we launched the Wastewater Optimization Program, designed to improve coordination, planning, and project delivery. This structured program helps staff stay organized, track progress, and make more effective decisions. It supports not only consent decree compliance but also long-term modernization and resilience.

The wastewater consent decree includes a comprehensive set of operational and maintenance obligations. Nearly all required appendices have been submitted, with only one outstanding—Appendix E, expected by December 18, 2025. These submissions represent significant progress toward regulatory alignment.

The long-term vision involves territory-wide replacement of our aging wastewater infrastructure. Because many components pose immediate risks, we have prioritized early action in three major areas: the collection system, pump stations, and wastewater treatment facilities.

Collection System Early Actions

To enhance our ability to repair failed sewer assets, we have created a prioritization system, identifying our most critical areas and addressing them while waiting for complete replacement to take place. Evidence of this can be seen with recent projects completed in Estate Tutu with the replacement of almost 400 feet of collapsed sewer lines, collapsed sewer line replacement in Estate Mon Bijou, and the Lagoon force main repair in Fredericksted. We have also prioritized sewer line points and manhole repairs territory-wide. All of this was accomplished with a tiny crew of dedicated employees. We are increasing personnel with four of eight

anticipated operations staff recently hired and have prioritized training. We have recently partnered with Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP) as part of our commitment to get all our wastewater treatment operators certified.

We are also advancing major horizontal infrastructure bundles in coordination with the Office of Disaster Recovery, the Virgin Islands Water & Power Authority, and the Department of Public Works. The St. Croix North Central Bundle and the St. Thomas East Bundle will deliver large-scale sewer main replacement with integrated utility coordination, minimizing community disruption and maximizing efficiency. This is a complete game-changer for us all.

Pump Station Early Actions

Our territories operate 31 wastewater pump stations; 90 percent of these stations will benefit from early action upgrades. On St. Croix, equipment for 13 small pump stations have been procured, with delivery expected in February 2026. Additional major equipment has been procured for the LBJ and Fig Tree pump stations. Designs for the full LBJ replacement is now fully complete.

For St. Thomas and St. John, more than \$1 million in pumps and related equipment was approved for procurement in November 2025. This includes upgrades for every pump station in St. John and most stations in St. Thomas.

Wastewater Treatment Facility Early Actions

At the Mangrove Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) on St. Thomas, a new effluent pump and variable-frequency drives have been acquired, with more equipment planned. RFPs for A&E services are forthcoming. Similar RFPs are already advertised for the Pedrito A. Francois WWTP on St. Thomas and the Harold G. Thompson, Jr. WWTP on St. Croix.

FEMA's prudent replacement funding—over \$3 billion across both districts—is critical to this effort and will support long-term resilience and compliance.

Public Trust, Community Engagement, and Transparency

With the territory's very visible waste management issues before us, restoring public trust is essential. To that end, the Authority has launched major initiatives to improve communication and customer service, and more importantly, immediately addressing issues as they arise.

The "Preserve Paradise Now" customer care portal is already functioning with a public awareness campaign slated to begin in the coming weeks. The portal offers a streamlined, transparent way for residents to submit service requests and track responses. Automated routing, real-time dashboards, and time-stamped records ensure accountability.

We have also engaged directly with communities across all three islands, attending town halls, addressing concerns about waste collection, bin site conditions, and landfill fires, and communicating plans for improved operations and fire mitigation. These interactions reinforce our commitment to caring, listening, and acting.

Upcoming wastewater hauler town halls will further support transparency around permitting, disposal fees, reporting requirements, and compliance.

Strategic Priorities and Legislative Needs

Over the next 12 to 24 months, the Authority's priorities include:

- Advancing the closure and expansion of both landfills
- Launching and scaling the Vegetative Waste Management Program
- Completing the Integrated Sustainable Materials Management Plan
- Expanding convenience centers and vendor partnerships
- Transitioning toward house-to-house collection
- Implementing enforcement tools to address illegal dumping
- Replacing critical solid waste and wastewater infrastructure
- Meeting consent decree deadlines across both divisions

However, these priorities cannot be fulfilled without legislative partnership. We respectfully request:

- Implementation of household and commercial waste fees
- Updates to tipping fees to reflect national cost recovery standards

- Stable and timely transfer of appropriated funds
- Tools for stronger enforcement against illegal dumping
- Support for capital investment needs and public-private partnerships

Chairperson Lewis and members of the Committee: the challenges we face are urgent, but they are not insurmountable. The Authority is taking decisive action—modernizing systems, advancing compliance, strengthening transparency, and building the foundation for a sustainable, resilient future.

But we cannot do it alone. Waste management is a shared responsibility that requires active partnership between the Authority, this Legislature, our federal partners, and the residents we serve.

With your support, we can stabilize this system, restore environmental integrity, and build a stronger, safer, more sustainable Virgin Islands for generations to come.

Thank you for your time and attention. I welcome your questions.