

Bill No. 36-0232

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An act amending Act No. 8018 authorizing the burning of vegetative debris after a local or federal disaster declaration.



PRESENTED BY

Ovid J. Williams

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

**VIRGIN ISLANDS TERRITORIAL
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY**

Submitted to

SENATOR AVERY L. LEWIS, CHAIRMAN

Senate Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection

Earle B. Ottley Legislative Conference Room

on St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands

March 23, 2026

3 Good morning, Senator Avery L. Lewis, Chairman, Committee on Government
4 Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection, other committee members,
5 the 36th Legislature Staff, and those in the viewing and listening audience. I am
6 Ovid J. Williams, Assistant Director of the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency
7 Management Agency (VITEMA). Today, I will be providing testimony on Bill No.
8 36-0232, to amend Act No. 8018 authorizing the burning of vegetative debris after a
9 local or federal disaster declaration, presented on February 2, 2026, and proposed
10 by Senator Clifford A. Joseph, Sr.

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12 The information to support VITEMA's position has already been provided to this
13 committee and put on record by Director Daryl D. Jaschen on March 10th, 2026, I
14 will take this opportunity to briefly summarize the necessity for this bill.

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16 The U.S. Virgin Islands generates a tremendous amount of vegetation debris after
17 natural disasters. Unlike other debris, federal rules do not allow vegetative debris to
18 be taken out of the territory. This vast amount of debris coupled with the very little
19 room for storage in our landfills creates a high-risk scenario for the territory.

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21 Amongst the few options to mitigate this scenario, air curtain incineration has been
22 identified as an effective and pollution-control option for the removal of large
23 amounts of vegetation debris. Unlike open air burning, the air curtain incineration
24 process produces significantly reduced smoke and particulate matter. Due to the
25 minimal impact on the environment and surrounding communities, this system is
26 excluded from any federal and local permit requirements and ensures minimal
27 effects to the surrounding communities.
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29 Though a way forward has been identified, Act No. 8018, as it is currently written,
30 bans the burning of all fallen trees and other vegetation debris generated because
31 of a natural disaster. This bill has become an impediment to the territory's ability
32 to address existing Irma and Maria vegetative debris currently in our landfills and
33 for any other future natural disasters.

34 VITEMA is in full support of Bill No. 36-0232, to amend Act No. 8018
35 authorizing the burning of vegetative debris after a local or federal disaster
36 declaration. This is essential for addressing the territory's ability to handle our
37 large amount of vegetative debris in our landfills. Thank you for another
38 opportunity to present testimony on this bill. I am prepared to answer any
39 questions from members of this committee at this time.

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