

Legislature of the Virgin Islands

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The Honorable
Angel Bolques, Jr.
Senator-At-Large
35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands

CHAIRMAN
Committee on Culture, Youth, Aging, Sports, & Parks

VICE-CHAIRMAN
Committee on Economic Development & Agriculture

MEMBER
Committee on Rules & Judiciary
Committee on Homeland Security, Justice & Public Safety
Committee on Housing, Transportation, & Telecommunication
Subcommittee on Energy & Infrastructure Development



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Senator-At-Large Angel Bolques Jr. Addresses Elevated Lead and Copper Levels and Urges Action on Poor Water Quality

St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands – Senator Angel Bolques Jr. expresses grave concern over the recent announcement by the V.I. Water & Power Authority (WAPA) regarding elevated levels of lead and copper in residential water usage, a matter of significant public health concern.

According to the V.I. Water & Power Authority's recent announcement, 35 out of 66 water samples collected have shown concerning levels of lead and copper. While WAPA suggests that flushing the water lines has reduced or eliminated the issue in most cases, it is deeply unsettling that Diamond, Castle Burke Community, Colquohoun, and Mon Bijou continue to exhibit elevated levels of these heavy metals.

Lead and copper contamination in residential water usage poses serious health risks that cannot be underestimated. Even at low levels, lead exposure can have severe consequences, especially for children and pregnant women. It can lead to developmental issues, cognitive impairments, and a range of other health problems. Similarly, high copper levels can result in gastrointestinal problems, liver damage, and, in rare cases, Wilson's disease, a severe genetic disorder.

In addition to concerns about the rate increase and the elevated lead and copper levels, Senator Bolques Jr. condemns the distribution of poor water quality throughout the Virgin Islands, as expressed in his press release on September 14, 2023. Reports of brown/orange-colored water with a foul odor are deeply troubling. Residents should not have to endure such substandard water quality. Senator Bolques Jr. is

committed to taking action to address this pressing concern. He firmly believes that every resident paying for waterline extension services deserves access to clean and safe water and will work tirelessly to hold accountable those responsible for providing water services in the Virgin Islands.

Senator Angel Bolques Jr. acknowledges WAPA's efforts to address these issues, particularly their collaboration with the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, and the University of the Virgin Islands in conducting comprehensive resampling efforts. The recommendations provided by WAPA, such as flushing pipes, using cold water for cooking, and avoiding hot water from the tap, are crucial steps for residents to follow. Additionally, residents should be aware of potential risks associated with their plumbing fixtures, including those labeled "lead-free."

To ensure safety, Senator Angel Bolques Jr. encourages residents to use an alternative source of drinking water, such as bottled water, until the concentration of lead and copper in the drinking water is effectively mitigated. The long-term solution, which is heartening to note, is WAPA's ongoing efforts to overhaul the entire water distribution system on St. Croix. It is imperative that WAPA continues to provide regular updates and maintains transparency regarding the progress of their efforts, with the community's health and well-being as their top priority.

Potential Health Risks if using this water for Drinking or Showering:

Drinking Water:

1. **Lead Poisoning:** Elevated levels of lead in drinking water can lead to lead poisoning, which can cause developmental delays, learning difficulties, and behavioral problems, particularly in children.
2. **Copper Toxicity:** High copper levels can result in gastrointestinal problems, liver damage, and even Wilson's disease, a rare genetic disorder.

Showering:

1. **Skin Irritation:** Elevated copper levels in shower water can cause skin irritation and dryness.
2. **Inhalation of Contaminants:** Showering with water containing lead and copper can lead to the inhalation of these contaminants, potentially affecting respiratory health.

Senator Angel Bolques Jr. remains dedicated to the well-being of the residents of St. Croix and will continue to closely monitor the situation, working alongside relevant authorities to ensure a swift and comprehensive resolution to these critical issues.

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