GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

STATEMENT

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STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE VINCENT O. WHEATLEY MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AT THE FIFTH SITTING OF THE THIRD SESSION OF THE FIFTH HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDSUpdate on Waste Management Initiatives

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Madam Speaker, I rise to provide this Honourable House and the wider public with an update on several initiatives being advanced by the Ministry of Health and Social Development through the Department of Waste Management.

Madam Speaker, the Territory’s waste management system continues to face significant operational, infrastructure and financial pressures. These challenges cannot be addressed through isolated projects or temporary interventions alone. A structured programme that responds to the immediate difficulties while putting in place the infrastructure, legislation, financing and operational systems needed over the longer term is required. In this regard, the Ministry is finalising a phased implementation plan for The Virgin Islands Waste Management Strategy. The plan is intended to provide a coordinated roadmap for the development of the waste management sector, beginning with preparatory and urgent actions and progressing towards a more integrated, resilient and sustainable system.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry has prepared several draft policy and implementation documents to guide this work. These documents are still being finalised and have not yet been approved by Cabinet. For that reason, I will speak only to the broad direction of the work and will not present the draft proposals as settled Government policy. Individual projects, policy measures and legislative amendments will remain subject to the appropriate technical, financial, procurement and approval processes. Nevertheless, considerable work has gone into identifying the Territory's most pressing waste management needs and the sequence in which they should be addressed. The draft plan follows a practical approach of stabilising the existing system before proceeding with major infrastructure expansion.

Pockwood Pond Incinerator

Madam Speaker, one of the most serious challenges facing the Territory is the continued absence of a functioning incinerator at Pockwood Pond. The loss of the incinerator has resulted in greater reliance on the burial of waste at a site that is already severely constrained. This has increased pressure on the available disposal area and added to the operational and environmental risks associated with managing waste at Pockwood Pond.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is therefore advancing the necessary work for the rehabilitation of the existing incinerator. The intention is to restore the unit as an interim treatment option and to provide redundancy within the waste management system. At the same time, the Ministry is advancing the preparatory work required for the proposed procurement of an additional incinerator with an anticipated capacity of approximately 50 tonnes per day.

Waste Diversion and Recycling

Madam Speaker, restoring incineration capacity is important, but it is not the complete solution. The Territory must also reduce the amount of material being sent to Pockwood Pond. The draft implementation plan therefore places emphasis on the diversion of green and organic waste, the strengthening of recycling operations, and the development of facilities that allow recoverable materials to be separated from the general waste stream.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is examining the equipment and infrastructure required to increase the processing of green and organic waste, including the proposed development of a dedicated organics operation at Paraquita Bay. This would reduce the volume of waste entering Pockwood Pond while creating opportunities to recover materials such as mulch and compost for productive use.

The draft plan also considers the future development of a number of materials recovery facilities and improved recycling arrangements on Tortola and Virgin Gorda. In the meantime, residents and businesses are encouraged to make full use of the recycling bins and services that are already available, including those operated by community partners, as part of our collective responsibility to reduce waste and support a cleaner environment.

Sister Islands

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is also working to improve waste management arrangements on the Sister Islands. In relation to Jost Van Dyke, there is an active tender process through the Ministry of Finance for the design, supply and erection of a steel-framed building for the waste transfer station. The previous structure was severely damaged during the 2017 hurricane season. This project is intended to restore a secure and functional facility for the handling and transfer of waste from Jost Van Dyke to Tortola. The works will include the replacement building and the associated structural, electrical and operational improvements required for the facility to function effectively. Planning is also being undertaken to determine the appropriate long-term operating arrangements for waste management on Anegada and to strengthen recycling and materials recovery on Virgin Gorda.

Madam Speaker, I wish to provide a brief update on the fire that occurred at the Virgin Gorda dumpsite on 26 September, 2026. The fire developed in the active waste area, producing heavy smoke that affected residents of Virgin Gorda and communities on the eastern side of Tortola.

The Department of Waste Management, Fire and Rescue Services, and other supporting agencies responded, using heavy equipment and soil to suppress the fire, along with water trucks to cool the affected area. Additional equipment and personnel were mobilised from Tortola, and the fire was extinguished by the

evening of 28 September, 2026.

Following an inspection, operations resumed, and the Department continues to monitor the site. Thankfully, no injuries were reported, and no equipment was damaged. The cause of the fire has not yet been determined, and the Ministry, together with the Department, will review the circumstances and identify measures to reduce the risk of a similar occurrence. As the representative for Virgin Gorda, I fully recognise the concern and disruption this incident caused and wish to thank all agencies and personnel who assisted with the response.

Derelict Vehicles

Madam Speaker, I turn now to the management and disposal of derelict vehicles. The contractor engaged to process and export derelict vehicles from the temporary site at Havers has completed the original scope of work and has since demobilised from the site. The Department of Waste Management is now working to relocate the remaining excess vehicles from Havers to the dumpsite, as part of efforts to restore the temporary site to its original condition. Meanwhile, the Ministry, in collaboration with the Department, is making the necessary arrangements to commence preparation of the new derelict vehicle processing site at Pockwood Pond by mid-November 2026. The proposed site is approximately two acres in size and is better suited for the controlled receipt, storage and processing of derelict vehicles. Its location will also reduce the visual impact on surrounding communities and persons travelling along the public roadway.

Madam Speaker, the Department is also continuing to identify, photograph, tag and record derelict vehicles throughout the Territory. Vehicles that have completed the required notification process will be scheduled for collection and transferred to the new site once the necessary operational arrangements are in place.

Madam Speaker, alongside this operational work, the Ministry has prepared a draft Derelict Vehicles Management and Disposal Framework. The draft framework is intended to modernise the manner in which derelict vehicles are identified, recorded, removed, stored, processed and disposed of. It examines matters such as updated disposal fees, stronger cost-recovery measures, revised notice periods,

improved digital tracking, environmental safeguards and clearer responsibilities among the agencies involved. The proposed framework also seeks to ensure that derelict vehicle operations are conducted at properly authorised and managed facilities and that oils, fuels, batteries, refrigerants and other potentially hazardous materials are handled safely, before vehicles are processed or exported.

Litter and Illegal Dumping

Madam Speaker, the Ministry has also completed substantial work on proposed amendments to the Litter (Abatement) Act. The Act dates from 1987 and was last materially amended in 2007. It's present penalties and enforcement provisions are no longer adequate to address the types of littering and illegal dumping now occurring across the Territory. A draft policy brief has therefore been prepared to support the revision of the legislation.

Madam Speaker, the proposals under review include stronger penalties for littering and illegal dumping, clearer controls over the misuse of communal bin sites and the transportation of uncovered waste, and new obligations for commercial premises and event organisers. The draft also proposes stronger protection for enforcement officers, cost recovery for Government clean-up expenses, and a legal framework to support the expansion of house-to-house waste collection. The proposed measures are not currently in force and would require the necessary Cabinet and legislative approvals before implementation.

Single-Use Plastics

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is also advancing work on the proposed prohibition of certain single-use plastic products. A draft consultation paper covering both single-use plastics and a proposed Container Deposit Refund System was published for public consultation during the first quarter of this year. Following that consultation, the Ministry decided to advance the two initiatives separately, based on their respective levels of readiness.

Madam Speaker, the proposed ban on selected single-use plastic products is at a more advanced stage and is now being finalised as a standalone policy. The feedback received through the public consultation is being consolidated, reviewed

and considered in the preparation of the final draft, which is being prepared for submission to Cabinet. The proposed restrictions would initially apply to selected plastic food-service items, expanded polystyrene containers and thin plastic shopping bags. Appropriate transition periods and limited exemptions for essential medical, disability and food-safety uses are also being considered.

Madam Speaker, work on the proposed Container Deposit Refund System will continue separately. That initiative requires further technical, financial and operational development before it is ready to advance through the approval process.

Conclusion

Madam Speaker, the Ministry recognises that the public expects visible improvement in the cleanliness of communities and in the manner in which waste is collected, processed and disposed of. The challenges are substantial, and several of the required interventions will involve significant expenditure, technical preparation and legislative reform. Essentially, there is no single project that resolves every weakness in the system.

The work now underway is intended to move the Territory away from short-term responses and towards a coordinated waste management programme with clear priorities, stronger legislation, improved infrastructure and greater operational discipline.

The Ministry will continue to advance these initiatives in a structured manner and will keep this Honourable House and the public informed as measurable progress is achieved.

Madam Speaker, I thank you.

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