



## VIRGIN ISLANDS PORT AUTHORITY

ST. THOMAS • ST. CROIX • ST. JOHN

UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS

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## VIPA WILL REMOVE SEAWEED BUILD UP AT ITS SEAPORTS

The Virgin Islands Port Authority will remove and harvest the sargassum seaweed that has collected at some of its seaports. Removal has been delayed because the sole-source contractor's equipment to remove the sargassum is being repaired. The contractor has assured VIPA that the repairs will be completed in the next two to three weeks, and seaweed removal will begin immediately after.

The seaweed is being removed to help alleviate the foul aroma that is emitted due to the high sulfur content of the weeds. The odor of the seaweed poses no health risk to humans since it is in a well-ventilated area out in the open. Some people may feel an irritation similar to the inhalation of campfire smoke, strong smelling perfumes, Sahara dust or other mild allergies. Despite its odor, seaweed plays a vital role in our marine ecosystem - not only in U.S. Virgin Islands' waters but also in the Atlantic Ocean. Many different species depend on it for nutrients and shelter. It serves as a primary nursery area for a variety of commercially important fishes such as mahi-mahi, jacks, and amberjacks.

The 2019 summer forecast predicts thicker blankets of the seaweed than previous years. Sargassum seaweed is not unique to the USVI, and the overgrowth has been a major issue for most Caribbean ports and beaches every summer over the last several years. The thick seaweed also affects seashores in Florida and Mexico. Communities along the affected areas have begun to use the dried out and washed sargassum. It is high in nutrients and can be used to fertilize crops and farmlands. In Asian countries, it is also dried and used for medicinal purposes.

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*The Virgin Islands Port Authority (VIPA) is an autonomous, self-sustaining government agency established in 1969 as the owner and manager of the United States Virgin Island's airports and seaports. VIPA owns and manages 14 seaports, two airports and surrounding properties. It is a critical arm of the USVI's economy that facilitates travel and commerce and fosters tourism and economic growth via its port activities. VIPA's mandate is to develop and maintain the ports of the USVI to accommodate the current and future demands of our users, and to provide safe port facilities.*