

## Waste center, home rebuilding addressed at Safe Waste Summit

By A.J. RAO Daily News Staff  
Aug 14, 2018

ST. THOMAS — Eco-friendly ways to eliminate waste and stormproof homes took center stage Monday at the inaugural Virgin Islands-Caribbean Emergency Housing and Safe Waste Summit, held at the Great Bay Resort on St. Thomas.

The summit, which brought together public and private stakeholders from stateside and across the Caribbean, set out to form an “emergency strategic collaboration plan,” one that would encourage public-private partnerships in emergency restoration, workforce training and waste technology.

James Whitehead, co-founder of U.S. Humanitarian Aid Response Team, which helped spearhead the summit, said last year’s hurricanes and the ensuing response left much to be learned.

Waste management, in particular, has remained an ongoing challenge, with overflowing landfills, overburdened workers and no definitive place to dispose of debris.

Whitehead said a focus on smarter waste technology could prove not only environmentally sound, but lucrative for the territory.

“The global smart waste management market is expected to post a compound annual growth rate of close to 18 percent during the period of 2018 to 2022,” Whitehead said. “In the global trillion-dollar industry of waste management, 18 percent represents \$180 billion in growth. We need some of that money to get to the Virgin Islands.”

Whitehead said environmentally safe landfill waste disposal technology can convert debris into energy that can subsidize economically disadvantaged communities and public schools with electricity.

“Most importantly, a new safe waste Caribbean association would provide the Caribbean access to private investment — black and white capitalism working together,” he said.

Steve Viny, chief executive officer of Envision Waste Services, LLC, which is based in Cleveland, proposed such a vision to the group: a state-of-the-art waste management center that would take green and mixed waste and process it into fuel or recyclable products.

The center, which would be based on St. Thomas but have smaller, corresponding facilities on St. Croix and St. John, would hire local labor — up to 39 full-time jobs plus training — and not require any waste separating, Viny said.

Such a facility would allow for a “sustainable environment,” one that would bring abundant, cost-effective energy from all kinds of waste products, Viny said.

“Think of a cruise ship as a free load of oil,” he said. “We want their waste.”

Viny also addressed safety.

“If you pile up green waste at a height of more than 14 feet, it will catch on fire through spontaneous combustion,” Viny said. “This is very dangerous. It looks like a benign pile of garbage, but I’m here to tell you it’s a fire hazard. We would shred that, compost it and that compost could be utilized on the Virgin Islands. The compost would add to the soil, creating deep roots, strong vegetation and ultimately protect against erosion.”

Viny said the first phase of such a facility could be “up and running in 90 days” if local leaders have the political will to greenlight the project.

Sen. Marvin Blyden, who attended the summit, said his colleagues will likely throw their support behind the center, insisting they will see its apparent benefits.

The facility would mostly be funded by grant money from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Following Viny was Richard Randolph III, chief executive officer of Randolph Acquisitions, whose company acquired Earth Friendly Building Materials, manufacturer of the so-called EF Block.

According to Randolph, the EF Block is an insulated 5-foot by 1-foot block that provides permanent form work for structural concrete walls in buildings of all type of construction.

Randolph said EF Block is lightweight and composed mostly of recycled expanded polystyrene, cement and other green additives and bonders. The result is a block that is 700 percent stronger than an average wood-framed home, resistant to hurricanes, fires and noise, he said.

Randolph said an EF Block plant is expected to arrive on St. Croix in September.

Following the program, Blyden gave an island tour to all participants, showing them Tutu Hi-Rise and various debris sites.

The second part of the summit will take place today at UVI.

— Contact A.J. Rao at 340-714-9104 or email [ajrao@dailynews.vi](mailto:ajrao@dailynews.vi)