

Air Curtain Incinerator Bill Sent Back to Committee as Senators Demand Public Input

After Senator Kurt Vialet tried to special order the bill, lawmakers sent it back to committee so Bovoni residents and DPNR can formally testify on environmental concerns and the proposed use of air curtain incinerators.

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A bill seeking to install air curtain incinerators to handle green waste across the territory was returned to its committee of jurisdiction on Wednesday, after Senator Kurt Vialet attempted to special order it to the Legislative Session.

[Bill 36-0232](#) was heard in the Committee on Government Operations, Veterans Affairs, and Consumer Protection on March 10th. Despite support from the Waste Management Authority and

V.I. Territorial Emergency Management Agency, the measure — sponsored by Senator Clifford Joseph — was held in committee.

Lawmakers cited a lack of public consultation, as a town hall meeting for residents near the Bovoni Landfill was scheduled after the committee hearing. Some were also disappointed that the Department of Planning and Natural Resources was not available to share its perspective.

As promised, the town hall meeting occurred and DPNR submitted correspondence to the Legislature supporting Bill 36-0232. It was on this basis that the bill was special ordered.

Based on comments from several lawmakers, several attendees at the town hall meeting in Bovoni did not comment on the proposal then, but instead expected to be invited to the Legislature to do so.

“They were under the impression they would have had an opportunity for their voices to be heard,” Senator Alma Francis Heyliger confirmed. She indicated that she would have to vote against the bill as neither the residents nor DPNR’s commissioner would be given the chance to formally testify.

Senator Angel Bolques, too, urged his colleagues to carefully consider the matter to ensure that no one was “disenfranchised.” Senator Hubert Frederick agreed, stating, “I personally would like for everyone to have the opportunity to express their opinion on the matter.”

“We cannot be a body that dismisses people's concerns,” warned Senator Carla Joseph, who stated that she had been contacted by community members who are prepared to testify on the matter.

Senator Ray Fonseca stressed, again, potential environmental impacts. “The primary environmental issue associated is with vegetative debris burning, and often determines whether communities accept or oppose burn operations,” he stated. He suggested that the incinerators could be installed on St. Croix, since “I haven't heard any objections from anyone from St. Croix.”

Sen. Clifford Joseph appeared impatient, noting that the Bovoni landfill is already inundated with green waste and will not accept any more. Senator Vialet, too, urged expedience.

“I don't see how we're so scared of this particular bill when the very same thing that we're trying to eliminate is happening now. People are saying there's too much emission, but it's going to be way less emission than what we presently facing right now,” he argued.

Senator Avery Lewis wanted the bill to move forward as well. “Sometimes we just need to pause a minute and do a little research, look up the information and see what the technology is about,” he said.

Senator Marvin Blyden, who was partly responsible for banning the burning of green waste after the hurricanes, admitted that there is “way too much green waste at our landfills.” He supported the move to install incinerators, but agreed there should be “discussion” before the vote.

Senate President Milton Potter feared that without proper vetting, “opposition folks” would have “an opportunity to say I did not have a chance to put my position on the record.”

Following an extended recess, lawmakers agreed to return the bill to its committee of jurisdiction, chaired by Sen. Lewis. A meeting is now scheduled for Monday, March 23rd, where community members and DPNR will be invited to testify.

“That way, we'll have a balance on both sides. We have the government, we have the community,” Senator Lewis stated.

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