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News Local news

## Sunscreen Think Tank Marks Two Years Since Toxic Sunscreen Ban

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Oriel Blake, Virgin Islands Professional Charter Association; Senator Steven D. Payne Sr.; Adrian Davis, managing director of CinnOpCo; Lisa Hamilton, USVI Hotel & Tourism Association president; Senator Marvin A. Blyden; Blyden's chief of staff Ishani Chinnery; Tonia Lovejoy, executive director for Friends of the VI National Park; Harith Wickrema, Island Green Living Board president; Frank Cummings, president of CORE; Licensing and Consumer Affairs Commissioner Richard Evangelista; Kelly McKinney, executive director of Island Green Living; Angel Bolques Jr., legislative researcher and public Liaison for Blyden; Marilyn Brandt, UVI research associate professor of marine and environmental Science; Jeff Miller, former National Park Service scientist specializing in coral reefs; Linda Suchochleb, Island Green Living; V.I. National Park Superintendent Nigel Fields, Logan Williams, Conservation Manager for Coral World Ocean Park. (Image courtesy of Lisa Herbst)

March 30 marked two years since the U.S. Virgin Island's Toxic **Sunscreen Law went into effect**, the country's first and most far-reaching ban on sunscreens containing oxybenzone, octinoxate and octocrylene, which are devastating to coral, marine life and human health.

In recognition, a group of 20-plus Virgin Islanders including Senator Marvin A. Blyden, Senator Steven D. Payne Sr., V.I. National Park Superintendent Nigel Field, Licensing and Consumer Affairs Commissioner Richard Evangelista, Frank Cummings of C.O.R.E., Lisa Hamilton of the USVI Hotel & Tourism Association; Kitty Edwards of Licensing and Consumer Affairs, Oriel Blake of V.I. Professional Charter Association and three scientists specializing in coral: Marilyn Brandt, Jeffrey Miller and Logan Williams, met at Trunk Bay on St. John to explore how to build awareness and compliance of the ban on "Toxic 3 Os" sunscreens.

"We are pleased to see such interest and cooperation on this issue from these USVI leaders. Unfortunately despite the law up until now, toxic sunscreen is being brought in by tourists, sold in territory stores and used by visitors and residents alike," explained Harith Wickrema, president of

Island Green Living Association. "However we see the tide changing. There are a plethora of safe and effective mineral sunscreens on the market – we all just need to do a better job of education and encouraging compliance." A selection of excellent mineral sunscreen options containing zinc oxide and titanium dioxide are highlighted here: <https://islandgreenliving.org/sunscreen-list/>

"Island Green Living and Friends of the VI National Park brought together this influential group to put their collective minds and resources together to collaborate on the launch of a comprehensive awareness campaign and other initiatives," added Tonia Lovejoy, executive director of Friends. "Trunk Bay was selected as the location to emphasize the natural beauty of the US Virgin Islands while driving home its vulnerability, as evidenced by the degradation of coral at Trunk Bay."

"Messaging about the three toxic Os should be shared with visitors well before they board their flight to the Virgin Islands, so we get to them prior to purchasing the sunscreen they intend to use," emphasized Kelly McKinney, executive director of Island Green Living.

Among the initiatives discussed was the formation of a Safe Sunscreen Task Force; outreach efforts to tourists directly and through airlines, hotels, cruise lines, charters, etc.; creation of public service announcements, advertising and signs; education of local retailers; educational contests in schools; free safe sunscreen stations at popular beaches and "sunscreen swap" opportunities, and more. Participants shared how they and their organizations could contribute to the efforts. Although a Department of Tourism representative was unable to attend, details on safe sunscreen options and the banned ingredients have been updated on their websites and information will be included in future outreach. DLCA Commissioner Evangelista also announced that they will soon be launching an app to make reporting non-complying retailers easier for the public. Key across the group will be consistent messaging and collaboration.

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