GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

PRESS RELEASE

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Calls for Vigilance as North Sound Sees Rising Marine Activity

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The Marine Safety Investigation and Reporting Authority (MSIRA) in the Premier's Office is urging all mariners operating in the North Sound area to prioritise safety, especially as marine activity continues to increase across The Virgin Islands.

Virgin Gorda (North & South), Norman Island, Cooper Island, Jost Van Dyke, and other islands known for mooring and anchoring are currently experiencing heavy traffic, as charter vessels, private boats, dinghies, swimmers, and water sports enthusiasts all share the same waters.

"In these busy conditions, decisions such as maintaining a safe speed, keeping a proper lookout, staying situationally aware, and ensuring that the captain is sober, can make the difference between a safe day on the water and a serious incident," Mr. Jerome Padmore, Chief Marine Accident Investigator, declared.

He referred to a tragic fatal accident in the North Sound area in 2024 involving a dinghy and a yacht tender, and said this was a stark reminder that safety must be a priority on every journey, no matter how short or familiar the route may seem.

Mr. Padmore said, "Recent reports, especially in the North Sound area, have raised concerns about vessels operating at excessive speeds in confined areas, transiting through mooring fields too quickly, and anchoring in locations that block safe passage." He added: "These actions increase risks, particularly where there are water sports, swimmers, and resort tenders frequently moving between the channel and other areas, especially at night when visibility is reduced, and vessel movements can be unpredictable."

The Marine Safety Investigation and Reporting Authority (MSIRA) is reminding all operators, captains, and charter companies of the importance of adhering to The Virgin Islands Merchant Shipping Act 2001 and the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREGs). This includes maintaining a proper lookout, proceeding at a safe speed, and taking early action to avoid danger.

According to Mr. Padmore, these are not merely rules but laws which are essential safety tools designed to protect and safeguard lives. He said it is essential to follow these rules and regulations while navigating the waters of the Virgin Islands:

- Operate at safe and controlled speeds, 5 knots within channels and mooring fields, as these are no-wake zones;

- Display proper lighting at night in accordance with The Virgin Islands Merchant Shipping Act, 2001 and International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea (COLREGs)’

- Avoid high-speed transit through channels and mooring fields;

- Remain vigilant for swimmers, paddlers, and other low-profile craft that may be difficult to see in the dark.

Mariners are also reminded that under the Merchant Shipping Act of 2001, all marine accidents and incidents must be reported to the MSIRA. “Reporting is crucial for identifying safety trends and preventing future harm, and it is vital for protecting everyone who uses our waters,” Mr. Padmore stated.

The Authority encourages all boaters, both commercial and recreational, to slow down, stay alert, and look out for one another. The Authority reminds mariners that these mooring fields and anchorages are shared spaces, and fostering a culture of safety will ensure it remains enjoyable for all.

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About:

The Marine Safety Investigation and Reporting Authority (MSIRA) operates under the Premier’s Office and is the official body responsible for the independent investigation of marine accidents and incidents within the territorial waters of The Virgin Islands. Guided by the Merchant Shipping (Accident Reporting and Investigation) Regulations, 2020 and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) Casualty Investigation Code, MSIRA's primary objective is to enhance maritime safety through fact-based investigations, the identification of safety issues, and the issuance of recommendations aimed at preventing future occurrences. MSIRA investigations do not seek to apportion blame or establish liability.

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Additional Documents or Media

- vigilance_as_north_sound_sees_rising_marine_activity.pdf