

Watershed Awareness

Scorecard for Virgin Islands Residents

All Virgin Islanders are concerned about their environment. However, we sometimes overlook many things around us that can harm our coastal waters and the plants and animals that live there. The following questions offer you a way to test how much you know about the watershed you live in.

What is a Watershed?

A watershed is the land that water flows across and/or under to drain to a common outlet (gut, pond, mangrove lagoon, beach, or other coastal area). **Everyone lives in a watershed!**

- ☐ If you know where the surface water runoff from your property goes, give yourself **10 points**. Add **10 points** if you know the gut, pond, or beach that the water flows into. Why? **Because you know your watershed address!**
- ☐ If you have a septic tank and/or cistern or drinking water well, and know where they are located, **+10 points**. If they are within 30 feet of each other, **-5 points**. If you can smell your septic system, **-20 points**.
- ☐ If you recycle: aluminum or plastic bottles, **+10 points**, used motor oil, **+10 points**.
- ☐ If you practice composting or mulching, **+20 points**.
- ☐ If you buy or use non-toxic, recycled, or other environmentally-friendly household products, **+20 points**.
- ☐ If you have written a letter or called a legislator, public official, or newspaper about a problem in your watershed or the V.I. environment in general, **+20 points**.
- ☐ If you are active in a home owner organization, **+10 points**. If you are active in an environmental organization, or work to promote environmental awareness, **+10 points**. If you have been actively involved in a land use issue in your watershed or on your island in the last year, **+20 points**.

Total

Scoring:

100 and over: You are a good friend to your watershed.

80 - 99: You are aware and working hard for your watershed.

50 - 79: You could do more for your watershed.

Less than 50: You need to become more aware of your watershed.

Water Quality in the Virgin Islands

The water resources of the Virgin Islands are unique. Our white sand beaches; warm, clear, turquoise waters; diverse coral reefs; and multitudes of colorful fish delight residents and tourists alike. However, all is not well in Paradise.

Every year our water resources become more degraded due to the effects of human activities. Land clearing practices that fell our moist tropical forests and endanger many native plants and animals also lead to uncontrolled erosion. **Sediment** eroded from these sites clogs roadways and guts and causes property damage; clouds our coastal waters, making them unfit for bathing, swimming, snorkeling & diving; smothers coral reefs, seagrass beds, and fish; and harms other aquatic life.

Wastewater from failing or improperly maintained septic systems and sewage treatment plants pollutes our surface and ground water and creates a public health hazard.

Toxic household and automotive care products dumped directly onto the ground or into guts pollute both surface and ground water. Dumping these products in toilets or down drains can also cause septic systems to fail.

These problems may seem insurmountable, but there are many actions we can take in our daily lives to prevent or minimize pollution:

-  We can buy and use non-toxic household products.
-  We can properly store and dispose of existing toxic or hazardous products.
-  We can plant native trees and other plants to reduce soil erosion, and we can clear only those areas absolutely necessary for construction.
-  We can maintain our septic systems by having them regularly pumped and by not dumping hazardous chemicals into them.

For more information about what you can do to help our environment, contact:



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