

# BleachWatch Virgin Islands

## August Monthly Newsletter

**Current coral bleaching alert level: WATCH** as of August 28, 2018

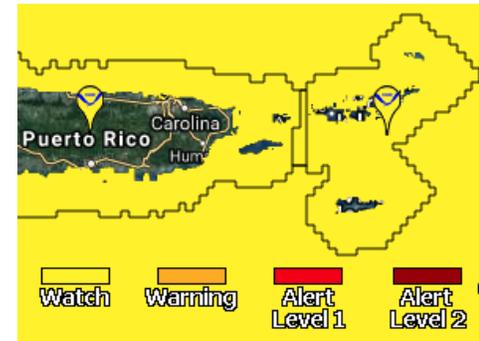
NOAA's Coral Reef Watch 5-kilometer Coral Bleaching Alert Area indicates that the US Virgin Islands (USVI) and surrounding area is currently experiencing low levels of thermal stress (Figure 1).

### USVI bleaching conditions summary:

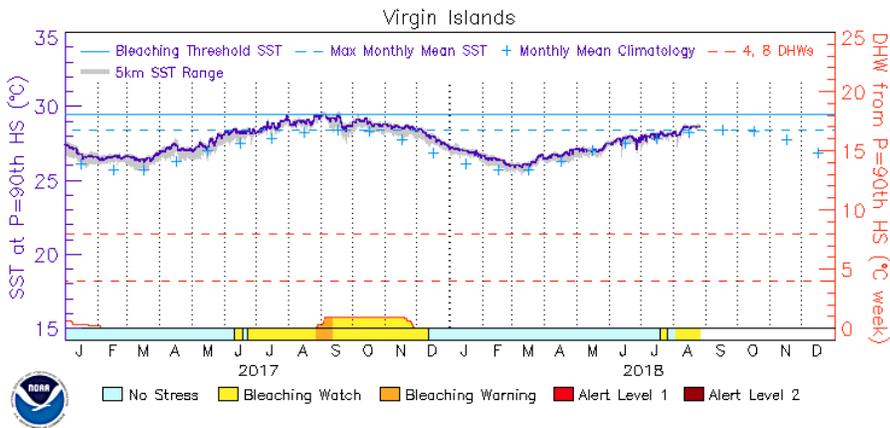
- **Ocean temperatures are higher than normal, but are not yet a major concern for mass coral bleaching.** The current sea surface temperature (SST) is slightly above the monthly maximum mean, but remains below the bleaching threshold (Figure 2). Corals experience thermal stress when the SST is 1°C greater than the warmest monthly mean temperature, known as the maximum monthly mean. The bleaching threshold is one degree above the maximum monthly mean. When SST exceeds the bleaching threshold, corals experience thermal stress and mass bleaching events are more likely to occur.
- **Coral bleaching risk is relatively low since temperature stress has not been accumulating in recent weeks.** The risk of coral bleaching increases when SST remains higher than normal over an extended period of time. Accumulated heat stress can be quantified using Degree Heating Weeks (DHW). One DHW is equal to one week with temperatures 1°C greater than the maximum monthly mean. Currently, DHW = 0 in the USVI (Figure 1).
- **Based on current predictions, coral bleaching risk is not expected to significantly change until December.** Based on 4-month predictions from NOAA, the USVI is expected to remain under a bleaching watch until December. By the end of December, the region is expected to be under no stress.



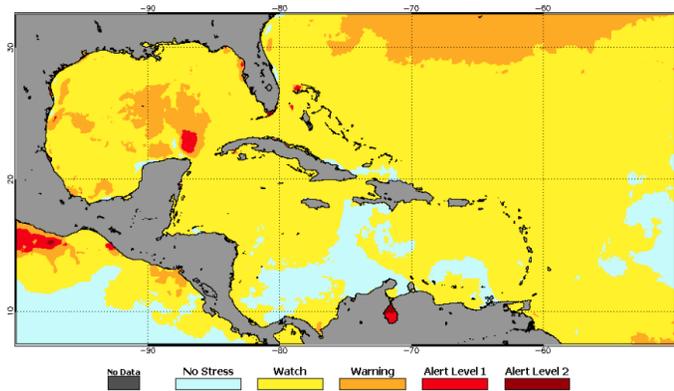
Current Coral Bleaching Alert Level  
Alert Gauges & Outlook | Time Series Graphs & Data  
Data values derived from 90th percentile HotSpot  
SST = 28.733 Anomaly = 0.480  
HotSpot = 0.000 DHW = 0.000



**Figure 1** NOAA's Coral Reef Watch local bleaching alert status as of August 28, 2018 <https://coralreefwatch.noaa.gov/vs/map.php>



**Figure 2** NOAA's Coral Reef Watch regional virtual stations data as of August 28, 2018 <https://coralreefwatch.noaa.gov/vs/data.php>



**Figure 3** NOAA's Coral Reef Watch Caribbean-wide bleaching alert status as of August 29, 2018 <https://coralreefwatch.noaa.gov/product/5km/>

### Volunteer report summary:

BleachWatch VI received 21 observation reports from May 2018 to August 2018. All of the reports came from sites located on St. Croix. There were 4 reports of individual corals paling including plate corals and brain corals. There were 4 reports of individual brain corals showing signs of disease (Figure 4). The remainder of the reports observed no signs of paling, bleaching or disease. Observations came mostly from 5-15ft depth range, but some reports included depths down to 90ft. These few isolated cases of paling or disease do not seem to be linked to thermal stress. Thank you to our volunteers and please keep reporting on what you see (even reports of 'no bleaching' are useful!).



**Figure 4** Diseased brain coral reported by BleachWatch volunteer (Photo: Hannah Babbitz)

### UPDATES:

BleachWatch trainings will commence on St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix in September – dates, times, and locations will be announced soon via email and the Reef Connect Facebook page!

The BleachWatch VI App is here!  
Download Our New Mobile App Today!  
Features: Quick Report, Pin Map, Submit Photos

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