

BleachWatch Virgin Islands

November Monthly Newsletter

Current coral bleaching alert level: NO STRESS as of November 28, 2018

NOAA's Coral Reef Watch 5-kilometer Coral Bleaching Alert Area indicates that the US Virgin Islands (USVI) and surrounding area is not experiencing thermal stress (Figure 1).

USVI bleaching conditions summary:

- **Ocean temperatures have decreased over the last month and the territory is no longer under thermal stress.** The current sea surface temperature (SST) is slightly below the monthly maximum mean and far 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. Since the temperature is significantly below the bleaching threshold, corals are currently at a low risk of bleaching.
- **Coral bleaching risk is low because 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.
- **As the bleaching season comes to a close, the territory has transitioned from a bleaching watch to no stress.** NOAA successfully predicted that corals throughout the USVI would be under no temperature stress by December. As of late November, the territory has made the transition from a bleaching watch to no stress (Figure 1). Although the entire northern Caribbean region is under no stress, some areas in the southern Caribbean remain under a bleaching watch (Figure 3).

Virgin Islands
(2018-11-25)



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

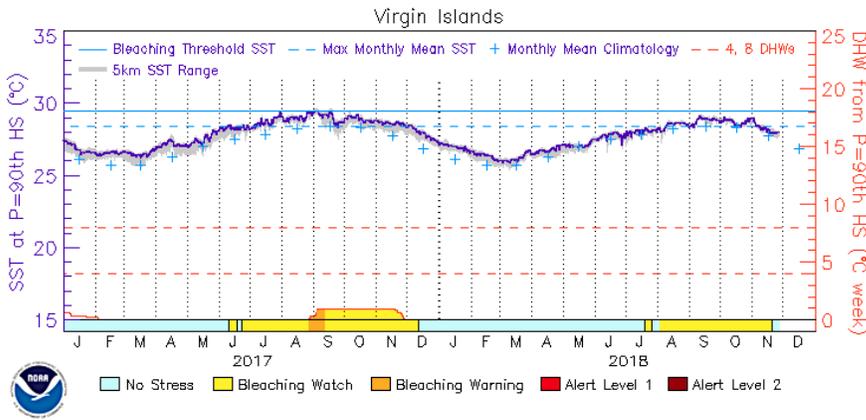


Figure 2 NOAA's Coral Reef Watch regional virtual stations data as of November 28, 2018 <https://coralreefwatch.noaa.gov/vs/data.php>

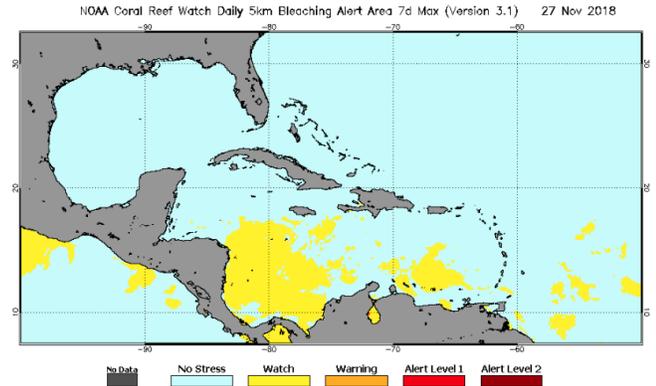


Figure 3 NOAA's Coral Reef Watch Caribbean-wide bleaching alert status as of November 28, 2018 <https://coralreefwatch.noaa.gov/product/5km/>

Volunteer report summary:

This month, BleachWatch received reports of isolated cases of low incidence bleaching (less than 10%) from Leinster Bay St. John, Fortuna Bay St. Thomas, Coki Bay St. Thomas and near Buck Island in St. Croix. All of these reports included very few individuals bleached including brain corals, boulder corals and pillar corals. The remainder of reports reported "no bleaching" on various sites around all 3 islands with one report noting a decrease in water temperature in the last few weeks.

UPDATES:

BleachWatch training and group snorkel event on St. Thomas – DELAYED date and time TBA!

BleachWatch VI is pairing with the University of the Virgin Island's Coastal Conservation Club to host a group training and in-water practice session. Participants will learn about BleachWatch VI and will have the opportunity to see examples of healthy and impacted corals in the water. Each volunteer will complete a BleachWatch survey and submit a report together as a group. More details about this event will be announced soon!

The BleachWatch VI App is here!

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