

# BleachWatch Virgin Islands

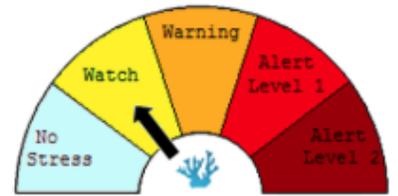
## September Monthly Newsletter

**Current coral bleaching alert level: **WATCH** as of September 27, 2018**

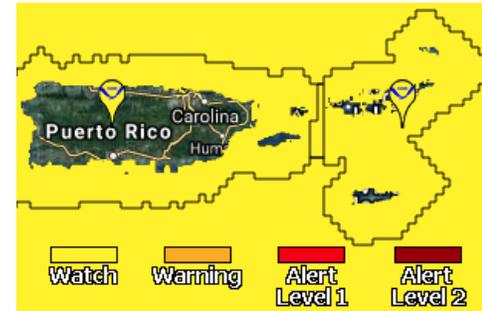
NOAA's Coral Reef Watch 5-kilometer Coral Bleaching Alert Area indicates that the US Virgin Islands (USVI) and surrounding area is currently experiencing low levels of thermal stress (Figure 1).

### USVI bleaching conditions summary:

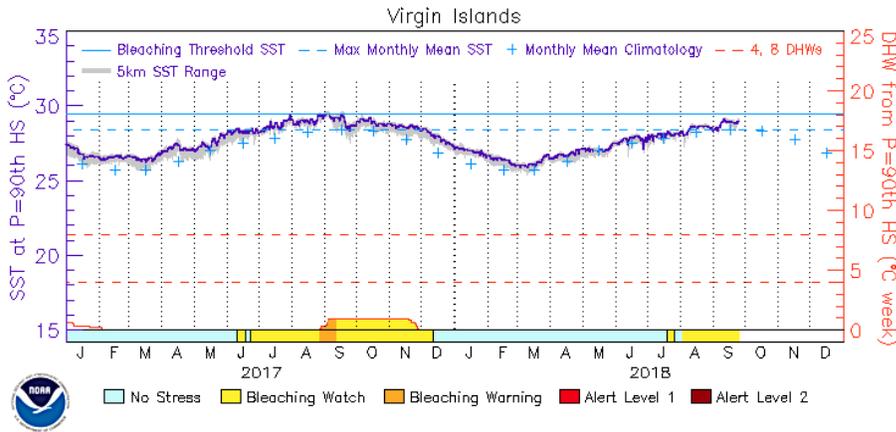
- **Ocean temperatures are higher than normal, but are not yet a major concern for mass coral bleaching.** The current sea surface temperature (SST) is greater than the monthly maximum mean, but remains below the bleaching threshold (Figure 2). Corals experience thermal stress when the SST is 1°C greater 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.



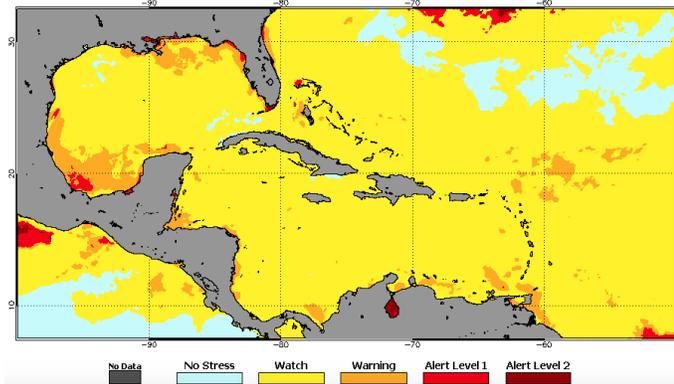
**Current Coral Bleaching Alert Level**  
**Alert Gauges & Outlook | Time Series Graphs & Data**  
 Data values derived from 90th percentile HotSpot  
**SST = 29.006      Anomaly = 0.686**  
**HotSpot = 0.000      DHW = 0.000**



**Figure 1** NOAA's Coral Reef Watch local bleaching alert status as of September 27, 2018  
<https://coralreefwatch.noaa.gov/vs/map.php>



**Figure 2** NOAA's Coral Reef Watch regional virtual stations data as of September 27, 2018  
<https://coralreefwatch.noaa.gov/vs/data.php>



**Figure 3** NOAA's Coral Reef Watch Caribbean-wide bleaching alert status as of September 27, 2018  
<https://coralreefwatch.noaa.gov/product/5km/>

### Hurricanes Irma and Maria: How storms can help bleached corals

Although hurricanes can cause significant damage to coral reefs, they can also benefit corals by cooling the water temperature and mitigating bleaching. Last September, hurricanes in the USVI reduced the SST and possibly prevented a bleaching event. The effect of Hurricanes Irma and Maria on SST can be seen in Figure 2. Notice that SST is currently warmer than this time last year.

### Volunteer report summary:

BleachWatch VI received only 2 reports of paling or bleaching this month, both submitted from St. Croix. These included multiple colonies of branching *Porites porites* that were observed paling and 4 colonies of plate corals *Agaricia* that were bleaching. All other reports indicated no signs of bleaching.

### UPDATES:

#### BleachWatch public training schedule:

- ST. CROIX: Thursday 9/27 at 5:30pm  
East End Marine Park Visitor Center, Great Pond
- ST. JOHN: Monday 10/1 at 5:30pm  
NPS Visitor Center Conference Room, Cruz Bay
- ST. THOMAS: Tuesday 10/2 at 5:30pm  
UVI Campus TED 115

#### Come learn about our new survey methodology!

BleachWatch VI has combined the quick report and full report to create a simple report that tells us about an entire site without using quadrats or completing long datasheets. Check out [www.reefconnect.org/bleachwatch](http://www.reefconnect.org/bleachwatch) for more info or to submit a report.

The BleachWatch VI App is here!

Download Our New Mobile App Today!

Features:  
Quick Report  
Pin Map  
Submit Photos



**Lisa K. Terry**  
**BleachWatch VI Program Coordinator**  
[bleachwatchvi@tnc.org](mailto:bleachwatchvi@tnc.org)  
[www.reefconnect.org/bleachwatch](http://www.reefconnect.org/bleachwatch)

**The Nature Conservancy**  
 3052 Estate Little Princess  
 Christiansted VI 00820  
 (340) 718-5575

[WWW.REEFCONNECT.ORG](http://WWW.REEFCONNECT.ORG)

