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Contact: Arah Lockhart
(340) 776-3700
alockhart@vidol.gov

**IAPMO, U.S. Virgin Islands Authorities Collaborate
on Employment Readiness Initiative**

U.S. Virgin Islands (Oct. 22, 2009) – The U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Labor (VIDOL), the Virgin Islands Housing Authority (VIHA), the University of the Virgin Islands – Community Engagement and Lifelong Learning (UVICELL) Center and the International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO) are developing a multifaceted training program that will provide individuals seeking employment in trade industries in the Virgin Islands with a direct path to immediate work and additional opportunities for current workers who desire expanded duties.

“In short, the program will successfully put our high school graduates to work and will enhance the skills of current workers,” stated Noel Lewis, special assistant to the executive director, VIHA, during a planning meeting earlier this year. “This program will significantly impact the business community by creating a skilled workforce to benefit the working community and provide avenues for these freshly prepared individuals.”

The trades encompassed in the program will include: plumbing, mechanical HVACR, solar, electric and hotel/building maintenance. To ensure that the program is a success, the focus will be based on real business needs and will begin with a training-needs analysis. To obtain feedback on the specific areas that most require attention, a series of focus group sessions have been scheduled for Oct. 28-30.

“A close relationship with the businesses and organizations who stand to benefit is essential for success. Therefore, we welcome participation from all potential stakeholders”, said Ilene Garner, director of the UVICELL Center “Business owners, employers, managers and supervisors need to weigh in and contribute to the design of this program by attending one of the focus groups.”

The face-to-face sessions will assist in determining how the training should be tailored to meet all stakeholder objectives, determining the jobs within each trade that should be included in the program, what training content will prepare an individual for each job, identifying the knowledge, skills and abilities that are vital for competent performance for each job, and determining how the training should be delivered.

All parties interested in taking part in a focus group session are invited to contact the coordinating agency, the Virgin Islands Department of Labor, through Arah Lockhart via e-mail at alockhart@vidol.gov or by phone at (340) 776-3700.

VIDOL Commissioner Albert Bryan Jr. stated: “This initiative, supported with U.S. funding, will provide lasting economic and social benefits. I encourage trades experts, business owners and all other stakeholders to guide us. Together, we can meet workforce demands.”

Virgin Islands Gov. John deJongh, Jr. said: “This effort will have my full support as we build a foundation for training that will affect both business and individual growth, as well as economic success.”

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Sponsor of the Uniform Codes, IAPMO – The International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials – works in concert with government and industry for safe, sanitary plumbing and mechanical systems. Learn more about IAPMO at www.iapmo.org.

Ph: 909.472.4100 • Fax: 909.472.4150 • www.iapmo.org

International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials
5001 East Philadelphia Street • Ontario, California – USA 91761-2816

