

The Virgin Islands Consortium

USVI on Alert: Lee Expected to Intensify into a Hurricane; Sandbags to be Distributed if Threat Worsens

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Tropical Storm Lee's projected path. By. WEATHER CHANNEL

Tropical Storm Lee is swiftly approaching hurricane strength and is forecasted to rapidly intensify into an extremely dangerous hurricane by the weekend, according to the National Hurricane Center's 5:00 a.m. forecast on Wednesday.

The latest advisory indicates that the storm is currently located about 1,265 miles ESE of the Northern Leeward Islands, and it's heading west-northwest at 14 mph. Maximum sustained winds have increased to nearly 65 mph, and the storm's minimum central

pressure has been measured at 997 mb (29.44 inches).

While no coastal watches or warnings are currently in effect, residents and interests in the Leeward Islands are advised to closely monitor the storm's progress. The V.I. Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) has been preparing for the storm and stands ready to distribute sandbags and tons of sand to households across the territory if a "credible threat" is declared, according to the agency's director, Daryl Jaschen.

Latest Advisory and Forecast

As of 5:00 AM AST, Tropical Storm Lee was located near latitude 13.7 North and longitude 44.6 West. The storm is moving west-northwest and is expected to continue on this track for the next few days. The maximum sustained winds have picked up to 65 mph, and tropical-storm-force winds extend up to 80 miles from the center. Continued strengthening is forecasted, and the storm is expected to upgrade to a hurricane later today and further intensify into a major hurricane within a couple of days.

Preparations Underway in USVI

Mr. Jaschen says that all supporting agencies are preparing for any possible impact. The agency recently received funding to purchase new sandbags and several tons of sand. "If the situation worsens, sandbags will be distributed between Thursday and Friday," said Jaschen. Families interested in receiving sandbags must bring their shovels and fill them themselves, and each family is entitled to up to six sandbags.

The sandbags will be distributed at various locations on each island, including the V.I. Department of Public Works locations and fire stations across St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John.

Swells Expected to Reach Lesser Antilles

Life-threatening surf and rip current conditions are expected to affect portions of the Lesser Antilles by Friday due to swells generated by Tropical Storm Lee.

Warnings for the Leeward Islands

While the storm is expected to pass to the north of the Northern Leeward Islands this weekend, residents are reminded that forecast details could change and it's essential to remain vigilant. The average NHC forecast track errors are around 125 and 175 nautical miles on days 4 and 5, respectively.

The storm is expected to be a significant weather event, and all residents in potentially affected areas are strongly advised to monitor the situation and prepare accordingly.