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Life-Threatening Surf and Rip Currents to Affect Leeward Islands, USVI as Cat 5 Lee Passes North

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Category 5 Hurricane Lee.

As Category 5 Hurricane Lee barrels through the Atlantic with maximum sustained winds nearing 165 mph, authorities are warning of life-threatening surf and rip currents in the northern Leeward Islands, starting later today.

These dangerous conditions are expected to extend to the U.S. Virgin islands, Puerto Rico, Hispaniola, the Turks and Caicos, the Bahamas, and Bermuda over the weekend. The U.S. East Coast should also prepare for hazardous surf conditions beginning Sunday.

While the core of Hurricane Lee is anticipated to pass well north of the Leeward Islands, the storm's swells present a significant threat. Seas are expected to rise between 8 and 12 feet,

particularly across the Atlantic and eastern waters of the islands. As Lee intensifies closer to the northeastern Caribbean, even higher seas are possible. These swells are likely to result in high surf and perilous rip currents along the north and east-facing beaches of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Coastal flooding and beach erosion are additional concerns, particularly from late Sunday afternoon into Monday.

Uncertainties remain concerning rainfall and potential wind-related impacts. However, there is high confidence that Lee's track will steer well north-northeast of the islands. Residents are advised to stay tuned for future updates.

According to data from the Air Force Reserve Hurricane Hunter aircraft, Lee has reached category 5 status on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale, with further strengthening possible today. The hurricane is currently located near latitude 17.8 North, longitude 53.5 West, and is moving west-northwest at approximately 14 mph. This trajectory is expected to continue through early next week, albeit with a significant decrease in forward speed.

Hurricane-force winds from Lee extend up to 45 miles from the center, and tropical-storm-force winds reach up to 140 miles. The estimated minimum central pressure is 926 mb (27.35 inches).

Officials warn that it is too soon to predict the level of impacts Lee might have along the U.S. East Coast, Atlantic Canada, or Bermuda late next week, especially since the hurricane is expected to slow down considerably over the southwestern Atlantic. Nevertheless, residents and authorities along the U.S. East Coast are urged to continue monitoring updates on Hurricane Lee over the coming days.