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Moderate to Severe Saharan Dust Event Expected to Impact U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico

Health officials urge precautionary measures as hazy skies, reduced visibility, and respiratory risks expected from Tuesday through Thursday in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin islands

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Satellite imagery of the Sahara dust making its way to the Tropical Atlantic. By. NOAA

Beginning Tuesday, a significant plume of Saharan dust is forecasted to reach Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, according to the National Weather Service (NWS) in San Juan. This event, classified as moderate to severe, is expected to last until at least Thursday, bringing with it various environmental and health concerns.

Residents in the affected regions can anticipate hazy skies and reduced visibility throughout the duration of the dust event. The NWS has indicated that the dust plume, originating from the Sahara and Sahel deserts in Africa, will travel over 5,000 km across the Atlantic Ocean, significantly impacting air quality in the Caribbean.

The Saharan dust contains mineral particles that, while beneficial as a natural fertilizer for ecosystems, pose several health risks. According to the V.I. Department of Health, the dust can exacerbate existing health conditions, particularly in immunocompromised individuals, the elderly, and young children. Health experts have observed an increase in respiratory issues during Saharan dust events, such as sinusitis, allergies, asthma, and bronchitis.

Common symptoms associated with Saharan dust exposure include:

- Nose and throat irritation
- Sinusitis
- Allergies
- Asthma exacerbation
- Eye and skin irritation
- Acute bronchitis
- Risk of respiratory infection

Residents are advised to take several precautions to minimize health risks during the dust event:

- Have necessary medications readily available
- Stay hydrated and wear light clothing
- Avoid outdoor activities whenever possible
- Use face masks and eyeglasses to protect against dust particles

The NWS will continue to monitor the situation and provide updates as necessary.

The public can view the latest satellite imagery of the Tropical Atlantic to monitor the dust plume's progression through this [link](#).