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New Hazard Mitigation Plan Approved to Bolster USVI's Resilience Against Natural Disasters

Developed with VITEMA and UVI experts, the plan addresses climate change and infrastructure resilience

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Damage wrought by Hurricane Irma in St. Thomas in 2017. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

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Government House announced on Wednesday that Governor Albert Bryan Jr. has approved the 2024 USVI Territorial Hazard Mitigation and Resilience Plan, which aims to mitigate the impacts of natural disasters on residents, property owners, government agencies, and commercial enterprises.

“It goes without saying that we here in the US Virgin Islands are vulnerable to intense storms and other natural disasters,” said Mr. Bryan about the plan, which was developed on the recommendation of the V.I. Territorial Emergency Agency. “And, as many of us already know, devastation is an unwelcome possibility — one that we don’t want to face, but we face it we must – head on. This Hazard Mitigation and Resilience Plan is a huge step in the right direction.”

Researchers at the University of the Virgin Islands’ Caribbean Green Technology Center and the U.S. Global Change Research Project have observed that elevated temperatures, increased rainfall, and more frequent and intense hurricanes are indicators of climate change. These climate-related extremes are becoming the new normal.

In compliance with the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s mandate, which requires states and territories to update their Hazard Mitigation Plan every five years, the 2024 USVI plan presents a series of strategies for the territory to reduce and recover from natural hazards. The plan, developed by a team from the University of the Virgin Islands, also outlines ways to adapt to and recover from new types of hazards linked to climate change.

The USVI Territorial Hazard Mitigation Plan addresses a wide range of hazards, including:

- **Hurricanes and Tropical Storms:** Given the region’s vulnerability, the plan outlines strategies for preparedness, response, and recovery during severe weather events.
- **Sea Level Rise and Coastal Flooding:** Measures to mitigate the impact of rising sea levels, such as coastal infrastructure improvements and land-use planning, are incorporated.
- **Earthquakes and Tsunamis:** The plan outlines seismic risk reduction strategies, including building codes, early warning systems, and community education.
- **Landslides and Soil Erosion:** Identifying areas prone to landslides and erosion, the plan emphasizes land management practices and slope stabilization.
- **Wildfires:** Although less common, the plan includes wildfire prevention and response strategies, especially in forested areas.
- **Infrastructure Resilience:** Focusing on critical infrastructure (e.g., utilities, transportation, healthcare) to enhance resilience against various hazards.

The devastating impact of Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, underscored the need for a robust mitigation and resilience strategy, said Government House. These hurricanes caused unprecedented destruction across the USVI, the Caribbean, and the southeast U.S.

“With this Hazard Mitigation and Resilience plan in place, the territory is able to build a resilient infrastructure that can withstand the impacts of whatever may come our way,” Governor Bryan said.