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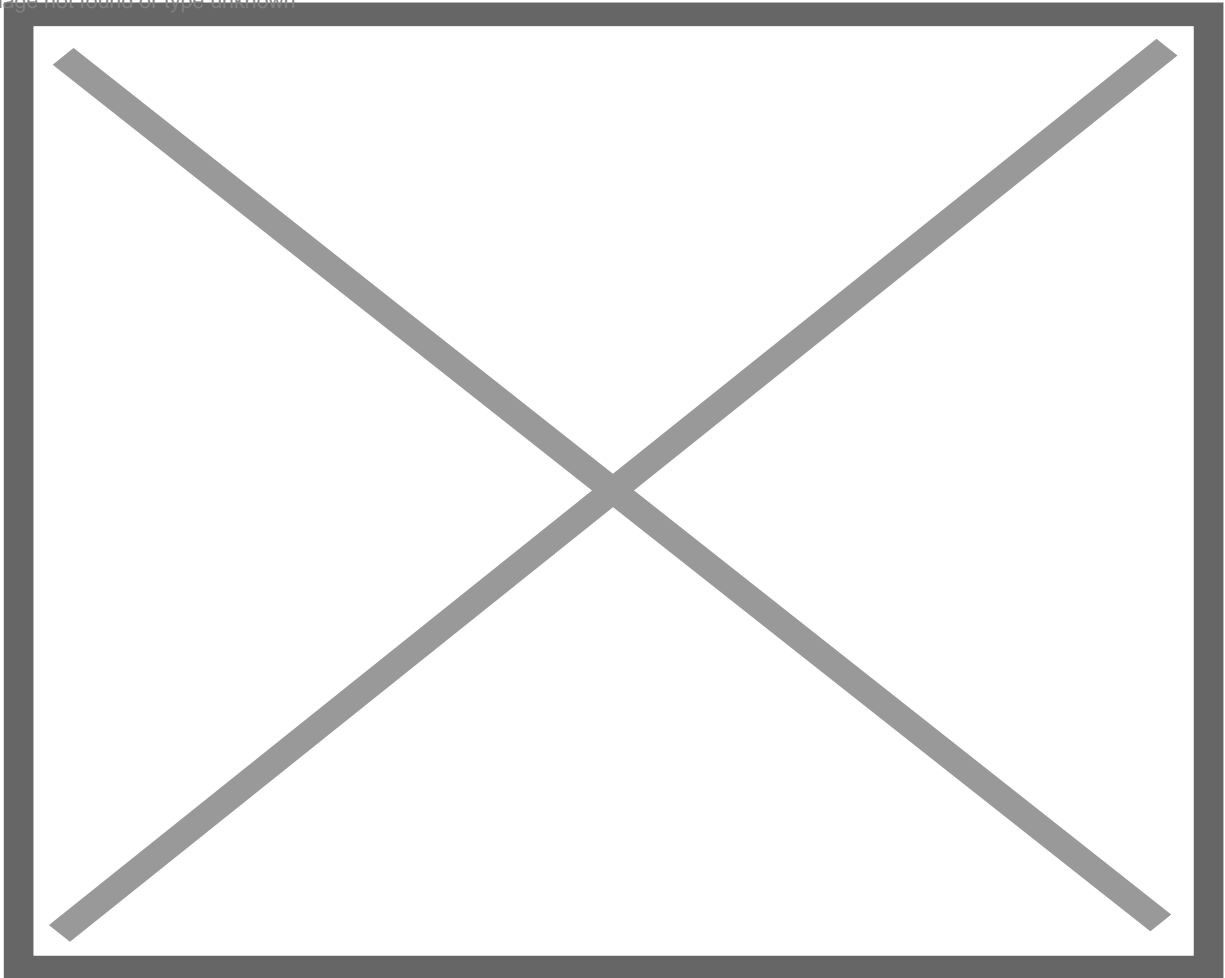
Ernesto Strengthens to 50 mph Winds; Governor Bryan Orders Early Dismissal of Non-Essential Employees

Non-essential employees dismissed at 12:00 p.m. to prepare for worsening weather; residents urged to secure homes and stay informed, with Tropical Storm Ernesto strengthening as it approaches U.S. Virgin Islands

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NOAA's NESDIS/STAR GOES-East satellite imagery of Tropical Storm Ernesto at 11:00 a.m. on Tues. Aug. 13, 2024. By. NOAA

Governor Albert Bryan has authorized the early dismissal of all non-essential government employees across the U.S. Virgin Islands, as Tropical Storm Ernesto gains strength.

The early dismissal, effective from 12:00 p.m. today, aims to ensure the safety of the workforce and provide ample time for personal preparations before the storm hits.

Non-essential employees are encouraged to secure their homes and take all necessary precautions as weather conditions are expected to worsen by late afternoon. Essential employees, including emergency response and public safety personnel, will continue their duties and remain prepared to respond throughout the storm.

"The safety of our community and government employees is our utmost priority as we brace for Tropical Storm Ernesto," stated Governor Bryan. "We urge all residents to take this storm seriously, follow all safety advisories, and stay informed through official channels."

Residents are advised to monitor the storm's progress. The governor expressed gratitude to the public and government employees for their cooperation and emphasized the importance of prioritizing safety during this time.

As of 11:00 a.m., the National Hurricane Center reported that the center of Tropical Storm Ernesto is currently positioned near latitude 16.9 North and longitude 62.6 West. The storm is advancing west-northwest at a speed of 18 mph (30 km/h), with this trajectory expected to persist through tonight. By Wednesday and Thursday, Ernesto is anticipated to shift toward the northwest and then north at a slower pace.

The forecast indicates that the center of Ernesto will pass near or over the Virgin Islands this evening, continuing just northeast and north of Puerto Rico tonight and into Wednesday. Later in the week, Ernesto is expected to move over the western Atlantic.

Maximum sustained winds have increased to approximately 50 mph (85 km/h) with higher gusts. Further strengthening is predicted, with Ernesto likely becoming a hurricane by early Wednesday. Currently, tropical-storm-force winds extend outward up to 105 miles (165 km) from the center. Recently, a wind gust of 65 mph (105 km/h) was recorded on St. Barthelemy.

The estimated minimum central pressure of Ernesto is 1003 mb (29.62 inches).

Hazards affecting land

Rainfall: Ernesto is forecasted to bring total rainfall accumulations of 4 to 6 inches over portions of the Leeward Islands from Guadeloupe to Dominica, and across the U.S. and British Virgin Islands. Southeastern Puerto Rico may experience 6 to 8 inches of rain, with maximum amounts reaching up to 10 inches, while northwestern Puerto Rico can expect 2 to 4 inches.

Wind: Tropical storm conditions are already present in parts of the Leeward Islands within the warning area. These conditions are expected to spread over the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico later today and tonight. The possibility of hurricane conditions exists for the Virgin Islands, Vieques, and Culebra this evening into tonight.

Storm Surge: A storm surge is projected to raise water levels by 1 to 3 feet above ground level along the eastern coast of Puerto Rico from San Juan to Guayama, including Culebra and Vieques, as well as in the U.S. Virgin Islands, including St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix. The British Virgin Islands may see similar surges of 1 to 3 feet above normal tide levels. This surge will be accompanied by large and destructive waves near the coast.

Surf: Swells generated by Ernesto are currently impacting parts of the Leeward Islands and Virgin Islands, and are expected to spread to Puerto Rico later today. These swells will reach the Dominican Republic tonight, the Turks and Caicos Islands, and southeastern Bahamas on Wednesday, and Bermuda by Thursday.

For detailed and up-to-date information, residents are encouraged to monitor the National Hurricane Center's advisories and warnings, and stay tuned to local weather updates

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