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Waste Management, Network Restoration, and Power Updates Following Hurricane Ernesto; VITEMA and WAPA Brief Public

Government offices set to reopen Thursday, schools closed for assessments; ferry and barge operations expected to resume; VITEMA and WAPA outline recovery efforts and emphasize safety precautions for residents

Hurricane Season / **Published On August 14, 2024 06:35 PM /**

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Fallen trees in the Barren Spot area Wednesday morning following the passage of Tropical Storm Ernesto. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

In the latest update provided to Virgin Islanders following the passage of Ernesto, which became a hurricane at approximately 2:00 p.m. Wednesday, Territorial Emergency Management Agency

Director Daryl Jaschen expressed hope that ferry and barge operations would resume on Thursday.

“As of today, right now, we did not finish the assessment,” he explained, saying that work, with the assistance of the U.S. Coast Guard, is ongoing.

Speaking in a live broadcast from Government House, Mr. Jaschen also advised on how various categories of waste will be collected.?

Temporary arrangements have been made for the disposal of green waste in specially marked bins at the Estate Nazareth and Cancryn bin sites on St. Thomas, and at the Anguilla landfill on St. Croix. St. John residents can visit the Suzannenbergh Transfer Station for green waste disposal, which will be accepted at the above sites from August 15 through 18 from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

On the weekend – Saturday August 17 and Sunday August 18 – bulk waste will be accepted at the same locations, in specially marked bins.

Government offices will open on Thursday morning to resume regular operations, but Mr. Jaschen reiterated that schools will remain closed to students. Staff, however, are expected to report to campus to assist with assessments.?

Network operators are still working to restore communications to full capacity, Mr. Jaschen said. “Other than that, we’re getting back operational right now within the territory,” he concluded, before handing over to newly-installed Water and Power Authority CEO Karl Knight.

Mr. Knight began by thanking WAPA employees for their work in keeping critical power connections to health care facilities online throughout the storm. “Hat’s off to the operations crew at the arley plants that was able to make that possible for us,” he said, also taking time to thank Unit 23 “which has been notoriously finicky, for actually staying online at the time when we needed it the most.”

Noting that the high winds lasted longer than anticipated, leading to WAPA crews getting “a slow start out this morning,” Mr. Knight nevertheless praised the progress that had been made in restoring several feeders delivering power to parts of St. John and St. Thomas. However, due to the fragile state of the grid even prior to the passing of the tropical storm, “we do anticipate that there may be some challenges” in restoring power across the territory, Mr. Knight cautioned. “We recognize there’s going to be pockets here and there.”?

Power restoration on St. Croix has been slower going. “We did have some generation issues that really stalled our ability to restore power,” he said. However, persistent efforts throughout the day have resulted in several feeders being brought back online. Crews are still struggling to clear vegetation from power infrastructure in the rainforest, Mr. Knight disclosed. “That’s going to be a challenge. I don’t know how much of a dent we could put in that tonight,” he remarked. Nevertheless, he estimated that 75% of the consumer base on St. Croix would have power restored by the end of the evening.

Despite the potential delays in power restoration, Mr. Knight said that previous investments in resilient infrastructure were paying off. “In the St. Thomas/St. John district, I don’t think we lost a single pole in yesterday’s storm event,” he declared, referring to the [new composite poles](#) that were installed beginning in 2020. “I think over in St. Croix, we lost seven poles, but those were the old wooden poles,” he continued.

Mr. Knight asked residents to stay off the streets as much as possible to facilitate the power crews as they worked to restore electricity. “The line crews are out working, visibility will be relatively poor, especially in areas that have not been lit up as yet,” he explained.

?On the water side of things, a break on the water main that feeds the Cyril E. King Airport has been repaired, but several smaller leaks are being worked on. “The standpipe on St. Thomas will be operable tomorrow,” Mr. Knight informed. The standpipe on St. John is already operable,” he continued.

Residents of Water Island were informed that officials from the Department of Public Works would be on site to assess damages beginning Thursday, the same day the passenger ferry is expected to resume operations. Barge service will resume on Friday.

Mr. Jaschen, the VITEMA director, concluded the briefing by reiterating the importance of safety and caution as residents resume their lives post-Ernesto.

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