

FEMA Announces Billions for Island-Wide Road Repaving on St. Croix, Territory-Wide Meter Replacement, Major Wastewater Upgrades and More

FEMA's \$3.2 billion commitment to the USVI includes infrastructure overhaul: island-wide road improvements on St. Croix, territory-wide electric meter replacement, upgrades to potable water and wastewater systems, and educational facility repairs

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FEMA has announced a significant \$3.2 billion investment in the U.S. Virgin Islands, with one of the most substantial projects being the island-wide road paving initiative in St. Croix.

The project, which has received \$1.75 billion in funding, aims to repair over 481 miles of roads, including the addition of ADA-compliant ramps, curbs, and culverts where required. The work

will commence once critical upgrades to the potable water, wastewater, and electric undergrounding systems are completed, ensuring a cohesive and efficient restoration of infrastructure. This means the island-wide road paving project is still years away, as the undergrounding of electric systems and upgrades to wastewater and potable water infrastructure are lengthy and complex tasks, often subject to delays and disruptions from change orders.

FEMA said \$1.25 billion has been allocated to overhaul St. Croix's potable water distribution system. This project will see the replacement of pump stations, water tanks, pipes, and fire hydrants in Christiansted and Frederiksted, modernizing the island's water supply to meet current industry standards.

Another initiative includes the allocation of \$2.5 million for improvements at the Richmond East Potable Water Distribution Sector. The installation of a fully automated bubble screen system is aimed at enhancing the quality of desalinated water from the Estate Richmond Desalination Plant by filtering out foreign particles such as sargassum.

FEMA's support extends beyond St. Croix, as \$173.9 million has been set aside to upgrade the electric metering system across the U.S. Virgin Islands. This project includes the removal and replacement of 58,660 Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) meters. On St. Thomas, \$57.8 million has been committed for the installation of 934 composite power poles to reinforce the island's power grid.

Kristen Hodge, FEMA's Recovery Director for the U.S. Virgin Islands, emphasized the agency's commitment to the territory's recovery efforts. "The consolidated repaving project is an example of how agencies can work together to consolidate and streamline recovery efforts and the utility projects mark our commitment to working with the Territory to strengthen the power grid and potable water distribution system in the U.S. Virgin Islands," she said.

The V.I. Office of Disaster Recovery echoed these sentiments. Director Adrienne L. Williams-Octalien praised the partnership with FEMA, describing the funding as essential to advancing the Rebuild USVI initiative. "Securing the funds for these critical projects is a monumental step towards executing the Rebuild USVI initiative, which will transform the territory's schools, healthcare facilities, and utility systems," she said.

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. called FEMA's \$3.2 billion commitment an "unprecedented partnership," commenting that this financial support "allows the U.S. Virgin Islands to forge ahead with essential infrastructure projects including potable water delivery, energy distribution, repaving efforts and repairs to educational institutions that our community will benefit from for years to come."

FEMA has also committed \$3.5 million to repair five buildings at the V.I. Department of Education's headquarters in St. Croix. Furthermore, the agency is working with the University of the Virgin Islands on a \$6.3 million project to enhance power and lighting infrastructure at the Orville E. Kean Campus on St. Thomas, which includes solar panel LED light pole replacements and generator installations.

To further bolster the territory's resilience, a \$49,000 hazard mitigation plan will protect critical university infrastructure from water damage during severe weather events.

Since 2017, FEMA has provided \$15 billion through its Public Assistance program for emergency and permanent repairs in the Virgin Islands. Of this, \$1.2 billion is dedicated to hazard mitigation, focusing on sustainable and resilient infrastructure development to reduce the cycle of damage and reconstruction.

