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USVI and FEMA Complete Two-Week Hurricane Readiness Exercise to Sharpen Response Coordination

VITEMA and FEMA concluded a two-week Capstone Exercise focused on hurricane preparedness, testing unified command strategies, emergency response, and critical services coordination through a simulated Category 3 storm impacting all three islands.

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Territorial and federal emergency officials concluded a comprehensive two-week hurricane preparedness initiative aimed at strengthening the U.S. Virgin Islands' ability to respond to major storm events. The 2025 Hurricane Capstone Exercise, jointly led by the V.I. Territorial Emergency Management Agency and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, focused on lifesaving operations, incident stabilization, and rapid disaster response, according to a release

issued Friday.

The exercise, which ran from June 2 through June 12, consisted of two structured phases. The first week involved workshops coordinated by VITEMA and supported by FEMA's Caribbean Area Office, centered on incident stabilization strategies. Topics included preliminary damage assessments following a hurricane, volunteer and donations management, and procedures for tourist relocation.

A critical part of the week's activities took place on June 4, when officials conducted an airfield assessment at Henry E. Rohlsen Airport on St. Croix. The assessment was designed to evaluate how best to handle incoming resources in the event of a disaster.

The second week transitioned into four days of tabletop and operational integration exercises from June 9 to June 12, conducted at VITEMA's Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs) on St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John. These exercises simulated a Category 3 hurricane, bringing damaging winds, heavy rainfall, and flooding across the islands, with St. Thomas and St. John most severely impacted. Through a unified command structure, territorial and federal teams developed and executed response strategies focused on temporary power restoration, shelter operations, evacuation logistics, and search-and-rescue coordination.

VITEMA Director Daryl Jaschen praised the effectiveness of the drills, which built on past experiences including Hurricanes Irma, Maria, and Tropical Storm Ernesto. "A very long but very successful two weeks of hurricane readiness and response drills just concluded," said Jaschen. "They were designed and built on previous years' successes and challenges." He reported that 15 territorial agencies, the Virgin Islands National Guard, federal partners, and private-sector stakeholders participated, reinforcing what he called a "robust response capability" across the Territory.

One key enhancement highlighted during the drills was the integration of the Virgin Islands Healthcare Foundation (VIHCF). VIHCF, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit Renal Center on St. Croix, now offers capacity to support the dialysis community during and after natural disasters, ensuring patients can receive care locally without having to evacuate. FEMA Region 2 and U.S. Health and Human Services leadership recently toured the facility to assess its readiness.

Federal officials praised the collaboration. Andrew D'Amora, FEMA Region 2 Regional Administrator, emphasized the value of proactive training. "The strength of our hurricane preparedness is in our partnerships and our willingness to train together before disaster strikes," said D'Amora. "This two-week capstone demonstrated the Virgin Islands' deep commitment to protecting lives and strengthening resilience."

Christopher Hartnett, Coordinator of FEMA's Caribbean Area Office, affirmed the agency's commitment to continuing support. "FEMA will continue to stand by VITEMA and the Government of the Virgin Islands with our partnership to strengthen the Territory's capacity to prepare for and respond to catastrophic weather events," Hartnett said. "The Capstone event demonstrates our commitment to collaborate on drills and exercises...to lean forward with hurricane response well before storms churn up in the Atlantic."

He also urged residents to review and update their emergency plans ahead of the peak hurricane season.