

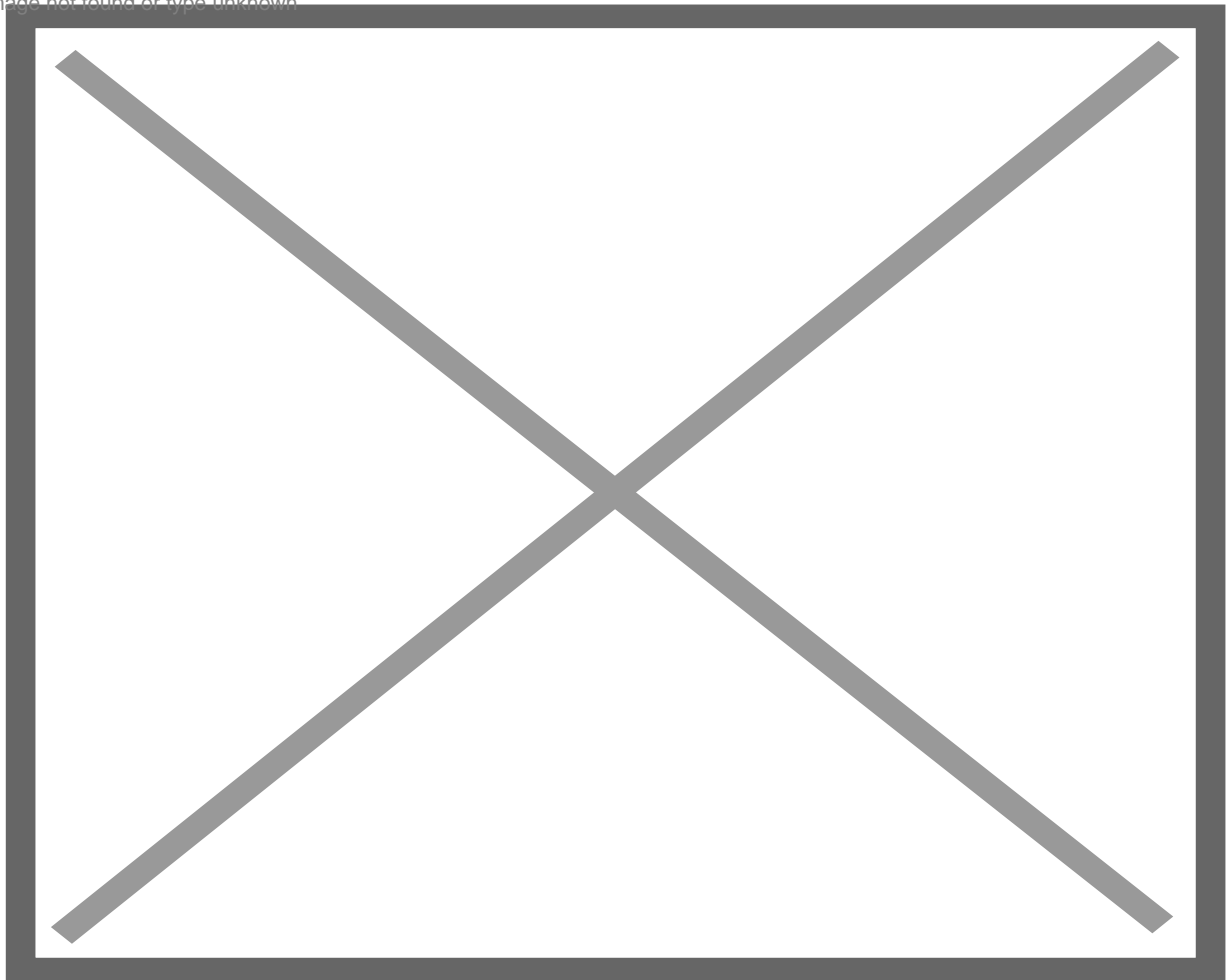
VITEMA Launches Sandbag Distribution as Tropical Activity, Heat Alerts Raise Concerns Across USVI

With two tropical waves approaching and dangerous heat advisories in effect, VITEMA's Daryl Jaschen announced the launch of Operation Blue Skies, a one-time sandbag distribution effort set for August 21–23 to help residents prepare for hurricane season.

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As the territory enters the height of hurricane season, V.I. Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) Director Daryl Jaschen on Monday announced “Operation Blue Skies,” a one-time sandbag distribution effort scheduled for August 21–23 across St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John.

The distribution will run Thursday through Saturday to accommodate residents unable to collect sandbags on weekdays. “Residents can come by and pick up from the Department of Public Works or V.I. Fire and EMS six sandbags, either pre-filled or, if they run out, please bring a shovel so you can fill your own,” Jaschen said during the Government House weekly press briefing on Monday.

On Water Island, sandbag delivery will take place separately on Saturday, September 6.

Additional support will be provided for residents with access and functional needs. “The Office of the ADA Coordinator, Mr. Julian Henley, will provide a phone number where individuals... can reserve your sandbags for home delivery,” Jaschen noted.

Collection sites on St. Croix will include Public Works facilities in Estate Concordia and the Isidore Hope complex, as well as fire stations in Cotton Valley and Grove Place. On St. Thomas, sites will include Public Works at Sub Base and fire stations in Fortuna, Tutu, and Omar Brown. On St. John, sandbags will be available at Public Works in Susannaberg and the fire station at Coral Bay.

Jaschen urged residents to prepare now. “Operation Blue Skies is only going to happen once this year, so please be prepared,” he said.

The sandbag announcement came alongside a broader weather preparedness briefing. According to Jaschen, the National Hurricane Center reports no tropical activity is expected over the next seven days. However, two tropical waves are being tracked. The first was forecast to bring rain and showers to the USVI starting around 5 p.m. Monday, continuing through late Tuesday morning. The second wave, currently off the west coast of Africa, is expected to approach the territory by the upcoming weekend, marking the first wave of August.

Heat alerts are also in effect. “There’s a dry area over Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands, which is resulting in an extreme heat warning for Puerto Rico and a heat advisory for the USVI, both between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. this afternoon,” Jaschen reported.

He reminded residents to take precautions: “Drink plenty of water, avoid strenuous activities during the hottest part of the day, take frequent rest breaks in the shade or air conditioning, and watch for signs of possible heat illness. Please never leave kids or pets unattended in vehicles.”

VITEMA is urging residents to sign up for Alert VI notifications by visiting www.vitema.vi.gov, where alerts can be delivered by text, email, or phone call.

V.I. Police Commissioner Mario Brooks also joined the briefing, outlining VIPD’s hurricane response plan. Officers will be assigned to emergency shelters and roadways, ensuring non-emergency personnel stay off streets. “We’ll be out until just before the storm makes landfall, then return to our base of operations until it passes,” Brooks said. Officers will then staff key traffic control points and enforce any curfews issued.

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. echoed the call for community vigilance. “Take a little look in on your neighbor,” he said. “Give them a hand. Get them registered for the VITEMA alerts. It’s quick. It’s easy.”