

VITEMA Tells St. John to Prepare for 10 Days of Self-Sufficiency; WAPA Warns Repair Materials Are Limited

Despite a quiet Atlantic season so far, VITEMA says St. John households should be ready to remain self-sufficient for at least 10 days. WAPA says it is cash-strapped and lacks materials for major repairs, while about 2,000 sandbags remain available now.

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VITEMA Director Daryl Jaschen speaks during a hurricane preparedness town hall on St. John, where residents were urged to keep at least 10 days of supplies and prepare to remain self-sufficient after a major storm. By. V.I. LEGISLATURE.

Despite a relatively quiet Atlantic hurricane season through early September, emergency officials are warning St. John residents not to become complacent, urging households to stock enough

food, water, medication, cash and other necessities to remain self-sufficient for at least 10 days after a major storm.

The warning came during a Thursday town hall on St. John, where officials from VITEMA, V.I. Fire and Emergency Medical Services, the Water and Power Authority and Department of Public Works outlined preparations for a hurricane or other severe-weather emergency.

As of Sept. 3, five named storms had formed during the 2026 Atlantic hurricane season, with none strengthening into a hurricane. An El Niño climate pattern in the Pacific has inhibited Atlantic activity, but VITEMA Director Daryl Jaschen warned residents that the quiet conditions so far should not alter household preparation.

“10 days is what we want you guys on St. John to be prepared for. This is to be self-sufficient. Take this very seriously. Help is coming, but I can tell you, it’s coming slowly because we have to get all the way to St. John,” Director Jaschen said.

Calixte Magabe, deputy chief of operations on St. John for V.I. Fire and Emergency Medical Services, similarly urged households to maintain at least a 10-day supply of water, non-perishable food, medication, cash and supplies for pets.

First-aid kits are also important because emergency responders may be forced to suspend field operations once conditions become too dangerous.

Mr. Jaschen warned that agencies will “stop answering 911 calls or stop going out when the tropical storm force winds get up.”

Two Shelters Identified, but One Will Open Only After Storm

Officials also explained St. John’s shelter arrangements.

The Adrian Senior Center is generally prepared to open ahead of an approaching hurricane or tropical storm. The newer Cruz Bay Community Hub, managed by the Department of Human Services, is designed differently and would open only after a storm has passed.

Mr. Jaschen said the Community Hub has walls that are “two feet thick” and is equipped with its own generator and water supply.

The Julius E. Sprauve School, meanwhile, would be used to prepare meals for people staying in shelters.

Officials Stress Generator Safety

Residents who remain at home following a hurricane could be dependent on generators for an extended period, prompting emergency officials to emphasize proper installation and operation.

Mr. Magabe urged residents to keep generators sufficiently separated from homes and properly ventilated to prevent dangerous exhaust from entering living spaces.

“The recommended distance for our generators, whether it’s a big diesel or a small portable generator...is 20 feet from the building,” he said.

He also cautioned against continuously operating generators without adequate airflow.

Generators may “catch fire because there's not enough airflow. They catch especially if we have 24 hours of extended run,” Mr. Magabe said.

Residents were encouraged to have generators installed and inspected by licensed electricians before they are needed.

WAPA Warns About Materials for Major Repairs

The discussion took a more sobering turn when Winston Smith, who oversees WAPA operations on St. John, described the authority’s ability to recover from major hurricane damage.

“WAPA’s cash strap. We don't have materials to make major repairs with anything, and it takes a lot of time to get material here after the storm,” Mr. Smith said.

He indicated that, depending on the strength of an approaching hurricane, he would prefer to shut down electrical service before the storm causes extensive equipment damage.

“If we're going to be experiencing a category three hurricane, what's the use of having the power on?” Mr. Smith asked.

He argued that shutting the system down beforehand could leave WAPA with repairs instead of destroyed equipment requiring complete replacement.

“If you let it burn down, you have to replace it,” he said.

Addressing senators attending the meeting, Mr. Smith appealed for additional support.

“We definitely need y'all more than ever. We need y'all to approve things and get things moving for WAPA.”

Roughly 2,000 Sandbags Available

The Department of Public Works said St. John still has storm-preparation supplies available, but residents were warned not to wait until a system is approaching to collect them.

“We have about 10 yards of sand available, and just about 2000 empty sandbags available, ready to be given out,” said Darren Jordan, director of roads on St. John.

“Don't wait till the storm is here and want to come and get sandbags,” he warned.

VIFEMS is also prepared to deploy drones once conditions are safe following a storm. Deputy Chief Clayton Brown said the technology would allow responders “to get that quick initial assessment of what's going on immediately in our area.”

Fire and emergency personnel would also assist Public Works with road clearing where necessary.

Mr. Brown ended with a warning that residents should resist the temptation to venture outside immediately after a hurricane, particularly if a government curfew remains in effect.

“The most important thing is if the governor says there's a curfew, stay home, please. There's nothing to see but destruction. You've seen it already. Stay home,” he said.

