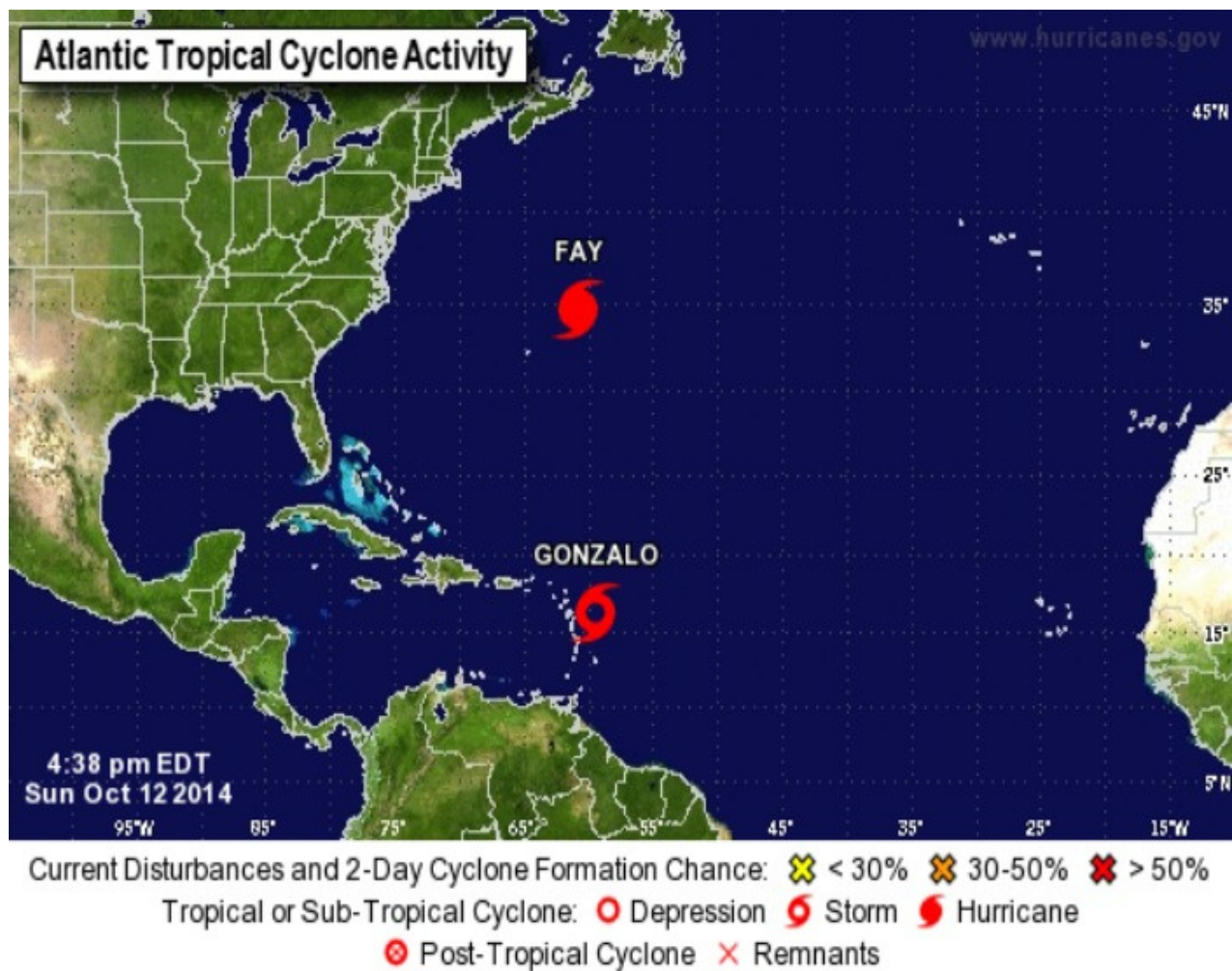


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Virgin Islands Under Hurricane Watch As Tropical Storm Gonzalo Strengthens

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The Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico are now under hurricane watch as tropical storm Gonzalo, only recently named a tropical storm, has been gaining strength rapidly and is now bearing down on the Islands.

Tropical Storm Gonzalo is developing quickly as it heads towards the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. By noon Monday, swimmers and recreational boaters should avoid the ocean and the general public should stay away from shoreline rocks until the tropical storm passes and weather and surf conditions normalize throughout the area.

Although it's a tropical storm at the moment, because of how rapid Gonzalo has strengthened, the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico were placed under hurricane watch by the [National Hurricane Center](#) because of the storm's ability to become even stronger in a short period -- most cases 48 hrs.

In a press release issued on Sunday, Governor de Jongh cautioned residents of the territory to monitor closely the storm, and prepare for rain and wind from Monday afternoon through Tuesday.

"In conjunction with our federal partners at FEMA, the National Hurricane Center and the National Weather Service in San Juan, I was provided an extensive update this afternoon by VITEMA Acting Director Austin Callwood on the present position of Tropical Storm Gonzalo and its projected path through our area tomorrow night. I also received a status report on the possible deployment of federal assets to the territory such as the FEMA advance team and other personnel. We have already begun discussion with our commissioners and directors of key local government agencies that would be activated to serve the community during a storm event: VITEMA, Police, Human Services, Public Works, WAPA and the American Red Cross," de Jongh said.

He added: "I realize that we are in the middle of a long holiday weekend but I urge all residents to get up to speed on the threat of this storm system and take all precautions seriously. VITEMA has begun issuing notices to the public via the news media and through V.I. Alert. Take the necessary steps to protect your homes and your personal belongings as we prepare for the winds and rains associated with this tropical storm."

Elsewhere on Sunday, the U.S. Coast Guard issued a press release advising swimmers, surfers, recreational boaters and mariners to steer clear of the Ocean by noon on Monday, and warned people not to go out to sea if they know that a tropical storm is approaching.

Said Capt. Robert Warren, Sector San Juan commander and captain of the Port San Juan: "Tropical Storm Gonzalo is developing quickly as it heads towards the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. By noon Monday, swimmers and recreational boaters should avoid the ocean and the general public should stay away from shoreline rocks until the tropical storm passes and weather and surf conditions normalize throughout the area. We will continue to monitor the heavy winds and seas along the islands to ensure the safety of the ports in our area of responsibility."

Here are some stats of hurricane Gonzalo as of 5 p.m. Sunday:

- Maximum sustained winds ? 40 knots; 45 mph.
- Minimum Central Pressure ? 1004 mb.
- Rainfall ? Up to 8 inches of rain.
- Speed ? Gonzalo is moving at 12 mph.

VI Consortium is following the storm closely and will provide updates as information becomes available.