

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Caribbean-Wide Tsunami Exercise To Be Conducted On March 25

Community Center / **Published On February 26, 2015 08:37 AM /**

Cynthia Graham **February 26, 2015**



The Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) will join other localities in the Caribbean as a participant in an exercise that will simulate a major earthquake and tsunami generated just off the Caribbean coast of Panama at 10 a.m. Atlantic Standard Time on March 25.

As part of the activity, VITEMA will activate the territory's siren warning system.

According to officials, the purpose of the exercise is to evaluate local tsunami response plans, increase tsunami preparedness, and improve coordination throughout the region.

"The recent 6.4 magnitude earthquake that jolted the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico reminds us that we are in a seismically active zone and that we must be prepared for earthquakes and tsunamis," said Elton Lewis, VITEMA director. "This important exercise will test the current procedures of the USVI's tsunami response plan and help us identify operational strengths and weaknesses."

The exercise, titled CARIBE WAVE/LANTEX 15, will simulate a widespread tsunami warning and watch situation throughout the Caribbean, which requires implementation of local tsunami response plans. As part of the exercise play, VITEMA will activate the tsunami siren warning system across the territory, as well as test its protocol for emergency notification to first responders and key government officials.

A handbook has been prepared that describes the scenario and contains tsunami messages from the National Tsunami Warning Center (NTWC) and the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center (PTWC). The U.S. NTWC is currently responsible for providing tsunami alerts to the Atlantic coasts of the U.S. and Canada, the Gulf of Mexico coast, Puerto Rico, and the British and U.S. Virgin Islands. However, the PTWC serves as the interim Regional Tsunami Service Provider for the other countries in the Caribbean Sea and adjacent regions.

VITEMA is encouraging schools, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, private sector businesses, and individuals to participate in the CARIBE WAVE/LANTEX 15 exercise by testing their emergency response plans in areas such as communication and evacuation.

Between 2010 and 2014, VITEMA installed 24 warning sirens as part of the Territory's Tsunami Readiness Program. In addition, the agency developed a tsunami response plan that serves as a living document to guide the public and private sectors, and non-governmental organizations in preparing for, responding to and recovery from a tsunami.

In Dec. 2013, VITEMA and the Office of the Governor also unveiled the first USVI Tsunami Evacuation Maps. In May 2014, the territory was designated as Tsunami Ready by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration – National Weather Service (NOAA-NWS).

The exercise will be terminated if any real tsunami threat occurs during that time period, VITEMA officials say.

For more information on the U.S. tsunami warning system, go [here](#).