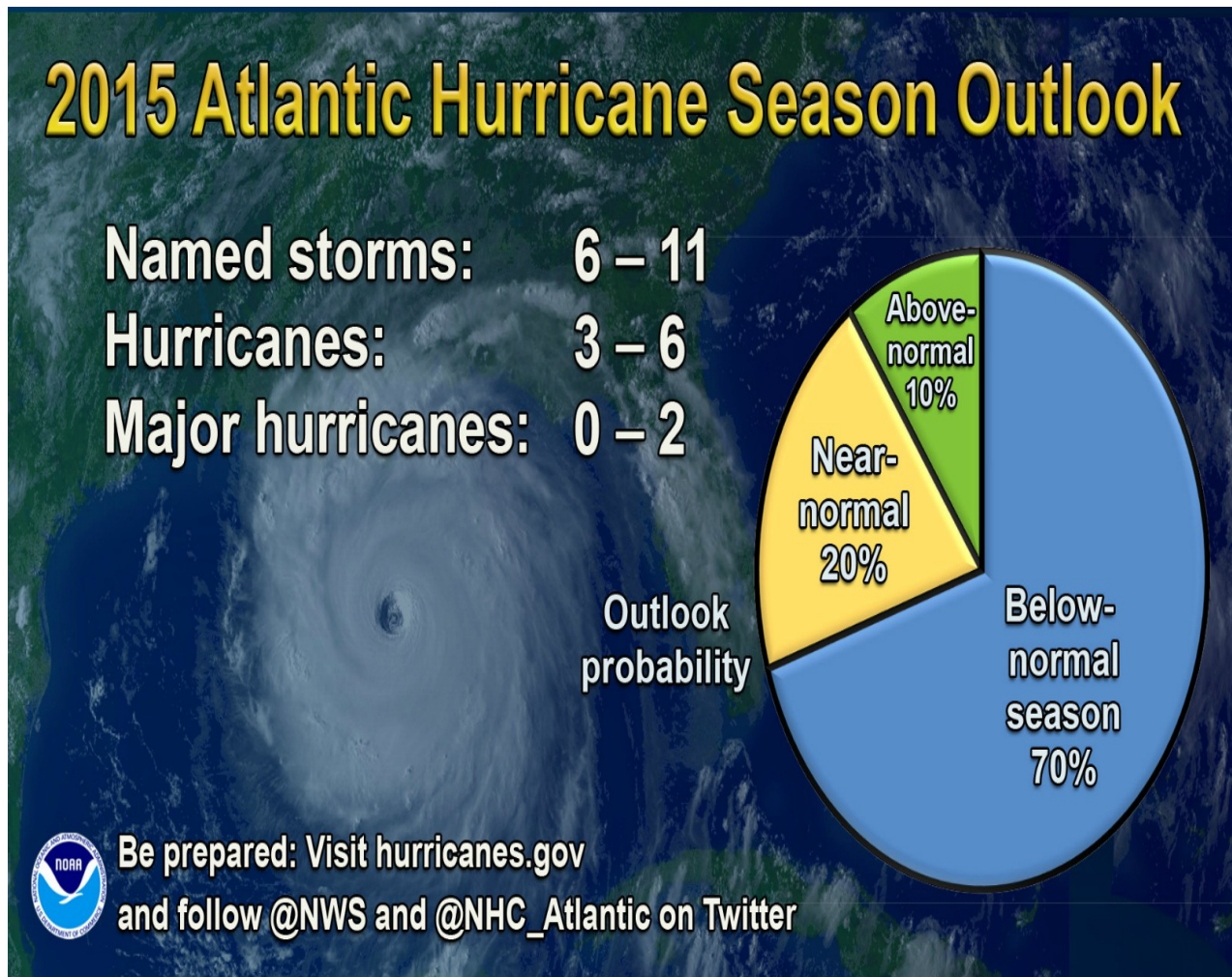


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Hurricane Season 2015: Everything You Need To Know

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June 1 marked the official beginning of hurricane season, and the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA), along with the Governor Kenneth Mapp administration, has issued readiness statements.

The season will last until November 30, however the good news is, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), there is a 70 percent chance that activity this year will be lower than normal, with only 6-11 named storms forecast.

NOAA estimates a 20 percent chance of near-normal activity, and only a 10 percent chance of above normal activity. Hurricanes expected to form are 3-6, and in relation to major hurricane threats, only 0-2.

Even so, the NOAA warns that below-normal hurricane seasons can still produce disastrous storms. Using an example, VITEMA cited the 1992 Atlantic Hurricane Season, which included only seven formed storms, yet the first was Andrew – a Category 5 major hurricane that rampaged through the islands across the Caribbean and South Florida.

NOAA says it will issue an updated outlook for the Atlantic hurricane season in early August, just prior to the historical peak of the season.

VITEMA Director Mona Barnes urged residents to be ready at all times, even when the forecasts predict otherwise.

"Many of the worst hurricanes hit during a season that was forecasted to be below average, including in 1989 when Hurricane Hugo hit," Barnes said. "We're urging the public not to become complacent and to remain vigilant. Be aware and be prepared. Being prepared means that you and your family have an emergency supply kit of essential items for at least three days, that you and your family have planned what steps to take to stay safe and to remain in communication and that everyone knows where to get information if a storm is approaching the Territory."

Barnes said special consideration should be given to children and the elderly, as well as pets, when hurricane preparations are being made.

"The better prepared you are, the easier it is for you to recover," she said.

VITEMA says it's continuing its efforts to ensure the local government is ready to respond and recover during the 2015 Atlantic hurricane season. On May 20th, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), with support from VITEMA, sponsored an executive-level seminar for Mapp cabinet members. The seminar was conducted by a team of nationally recognized homeland security experts from the Naval Post-Graduate School's Center for Homeland Defense and Security.

Department and agency officials met on St. Croix for the intensive half-day Executive Education Seminar, titled "Hurricane Response, Recovery and Resiliency." During the seminar, officials discussed authorities, capabilities and concept of operations relevant to managing a major land-falling hurricane in the territory.

Additionally, Barnes, along with the agency's three Emergency Operations Center managers and section chiefs, attended the US Army Corps of Engineers-South Atlantic Division's 2015 hurricane rehearsal last week. The rehearsal was designed to give local emergency managers a clear understanding of USACE's role in disaster response and recovery.

In June, Barnes is scheduled to tour FEMA's Caribbean Distribution Center in Puerto Rico, which also services the territory. The 80,000 sq ft facility receives, ships, and recovers disaster commodities and equipment.

Lieutenant Governor Osbert Potter launched what he's calling a hurricane awareness public education campaign, and has urged all residents to take the steps necessary to be prepared for the season. Awareness tips are currently being posted on GVI employees and retirees' checks.

Potter, along with Director of Banking and Insurance, Gwendolyn Hall Brady and Barnes, teamed up on the campaign, which will be ongoing throughout the season.

Brady recommended that residents do the following in order to prepare for the onset of hurricane season:

- Purchase a full-coverage Homeowners Insurance policy so that you can replace your home and contents in the event of damages from a major catastrophe
- Avoid Force-Placed Insurance, which is purchased by the bank to cover only the borrower's loan balance and limits their claim from damages to just the loan balance amount.
- Purchase a separate flood insurance policy
- Take photographs of their home; and also photograph and inventory valuables and other personal property inside of the structure;
- Store important documents such as insurance policies, deeds, property records, etc. in a waterproof and fireproof container or at an off island location; and
- Have a sufficient supply of prescriptions, dried foods, canned goods, bottled water, a flashlight and batteries, and a can opener.
- Report damages to their insurance agent immediately, following a major catastrophe.

For more info, visit [VITEMA](#).