

The Virgin Islands Consortium

VITEMA To Conduct Full-Scale Maritime Exercise Next Week

VIC News / **Published On December 02, 2015 10:49 PM /**

Staff **December 02, 2015**



The Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA), on Thursday, Dec. 10th, will conduct a full-scale maritime exercise in the St. Thomas-St. John district to test the first responder capabilities in managing a major incident at sea, a press release VITEMA issued on Wednesday confirms.

The exercise, titled Operation Pillsbury Sound, is set to begin at 8 a.m. and end at 5 p.m. on Dec. 10th, and will occur at the following venues:

- Pillsbury Sound, the body of the water between St. Thomas and St. John.
- US National Park Service docks at Red Hook, St. Thomas and Cruz Bay, St. John

- Schneider Regional Medical Center on St. Thomas
- and the Myrah Keating Smith Community Health Clinic on St. John

As part of the scenario, an explosion will occur onboard a ferry carrying 60 passengers on an excursion trip to St. John. To ensure the exercise is as realistic as possible, VITEMA is utilizing a vessel which will be located on Pillsbury Sound, near Stevens Cay, staged with victims — being portrayed by actors — onboard. The injured will also be transported to Schneider Regional Medical Center or Myrah Keating Smith clinic as part of the exercise play.

Google Earth image showing Pillsbury Sound.

First responders and emergency managers will be evaluated on; on-site incident management, marine search and rescue operations, communications, Emergency Operations Center management, public information and warning, on-scene security and protection and triage/pre-hospital treatment and medical surge.

“The purpose of Operation Pillsbury Sound is to get an accurate assessment of the Territory’s emergency first responder, government, and non-government agencies’ capabilities during a mass casualty, all-hazard incident in a maritime environment,” said VITEMA Director Mona Barnes. “This exercise will help us identify gaps and shortfalls in our current capabilities — from training, to equipment and response plans — so that we can make the needed improvements.”

Close to 20 government agencies, local and federal, are slated to participate including; Office of the Governor, the VI Police Department, VI Fire Service, Department of Health – Emergency Medical Services (EMS), St. Thomas Rescue, St. John Rescue, the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, Schneider Regional Medical Center, Myrah Keating Smith Community Health Clinic, VI Port Authority, American Red Cross, Department of Tourism, VI Department of Justice, VI National Guard, WICO, the National Park Service, US Coast Guard, US Customs and Border Patrol and FEMA. As part of the exercise, commercial and recreational boaters may also participate.

Operation Pillsbury Sound is being conducted in accordance with the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS)’s Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program, and supported by DHS-FEMA Region II and FEMA-Caribbean Area Division.

“Part of FEMA’s mission is to support our territorial partners in getting prepared for all type of emergencies and maritime security is of special interest to all of us living in the Caribbean area,” said Alejandro De La Campa, FEMA CAD Director. “We will be part of this exercise to support VITEMA, as we work together to ensure that we understand local needs and potential gaps.”

Following the exercise, VITEMA will hold an exercise “hotwash” where evaluators will discuss with participants, in a no-fault environment, their observations of what went well and where adjustments should be made.

“Our ultimate goal is to enhance our Territorial Emergency Operations Plan by developing guidelines for how we manage, not just land-based, but maritime incidents as well,” Barnes said.

VITEMA is advising the public that normal ferry operations will not be interrupted by the exercise. Additionally, if a major real-world incident were to occur, the exercise would cease immediately and first responders would return to their normal duties.

© Viconsortium 2026