

The Virgin Islands Consortium

V.I.T.E.M.A. To Participate In Caribbean-Wide Tsunami Exercise On March 17

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March 13-19, is Tsunami Preparedness Week in the territory, held yearly to raise awareness about the islands' vulnerability and risk for a tsunami event, and to encourage the community to be prepared, a press release the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (V.I.T.E.M.A.) issued on Thursday has made known.

In observation of the upcoming event, on Thursday, March 17, the territory will join several Caribbean countries in a regional tsunami response exercise titled "CARIBE WAVE 16." The exercise is designed to evaluate local tsunami response plans, increase tsunami preparedness, and improve coordination throughout the region.

CARIBE WAVE 16 will simulate an 8.4 magnitude earthquake off the Caribbean coast of Venezuela that generates a tsunami. This event will trigger widespread Tsunami Warning and Watch situation throughout the Caribbean which requires implementation of local tsunami response plans.

As part of the regional exercise, V.I.T.E.M.A. will test 22 sirens that are part of the tsunami warning siren system. Sirens on St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John are set to activate at approximately 10:15 a.m. on Thursday, March 17. Anyone standing outdoors and within a mile of a siren may hear the alert tone and voice message, according to the release.

The agency's 911 emergency communications centers will also practice its protocols for notifying key government officials. V.I.T.E.M.A. has also partnered with other government departments and agencies to hold events during preparedness week, including the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority, the Legislature of the Virgin Islands and the Department of Education. Evacuation drills will be held at Ulla Muller Elementary School at Contant on St. Thomas, Juanita Gardine Elementary School in Estate Richmond on St. Croix and Julius Sprauve School at Cruz Bay, St. John.

"There are numerous businesses, government offices and several schools within two miles of the coastline, which puts them at high risk," said Mona Barnes, V.I.T.E.M.A. director. "If a tsunami originates within the Virgin Islands, those along the coastline will have only minutes to move to higher ground and out of harm's way. So it is critical that everyone consistently exercises evacuating to a safe zone. That way the route becomes familiar and there's no guessing in a real event."

The exercise is sponsored by the UNESCO/IOC Intergovernmental Coordination Group for Tsunami and other coastal hazards warning system for the Caribbean and adjacent regions (ICG/CARIBE-EWS), the Caribbean Emergency Management Agency, the Centro de Coordinación para la Prevención de los Desastres Naturales en América Central, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and by the U.S. National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program, a partnership of 29 states and territories and three federal agencies.

Tsunami Walk

Ms. Barnes is also encouraging coastal communities, organizations, groups and businesses to hold a tsunami walk during the preparedness week. A tsunami walk entails walking from the tsunami hazard zone to a safe area. Safe areas begin two miles away from the coast or 80 feet above sea level. Visit www.VITEMA.gov/tsunami to view the V.I.T.E.M.A.'s tsunami evacuation maps that identify the tsunami zone, safe areas and assembly points.

"Anyone who lives or works within 2 (two) miles of the coastline should be aware that they are in a tsunami zone and make an effort to understand their surroundings and how to get to safety," Ms. Barnes said.

Local businesses set to participate include the Divi Carina Bay Resort, the Palms at Pelican Cove Hotel, Cottages at the Sea on St. Croix, and The Westin Resort & Villas at Chocolate Hole on St. John.

Participants are asked to register their activity at [here](#). For more information about the preparedness program, go [here](#).

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