

The Virgin Islands Consortium

VITEMA Begins Installation Of 20 New Outdoor Sirens

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The Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (V.I.T.E.M.A.) on Thursday announced upgrades and expansion to the All Hazards Siren Warning System, as it continues to enhance the USVI Tsunami Readiness Program.

According to the release, this week, V.I.T.E.M.A. began the installation of 20 additional outdoor sirens across the territory, including Water Island. This is part of an ongoing effort to improve early warning capabilities for short notice events such as a local or regional tsunami, V.I.T.E.M.A. said.

“We are pleased to announce that the All Hazards Siren Warning System will include an additional twenty sirens to strengthen our public warning capabilities,” said the

government agency's director, Mona Barnes. "This brings the total number of sirens to forty-four and the system now includes Water Island where two sirens will be installed."

The siren installation project is slated to be complete by August and is funded through a \$1,021,115 National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program grant provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (N.O.A.A.), for the U.S.V.I. Tsunami Readiness Program. The total cost of the new siren installation project is \$682,609.

The installation began this week on St. Croix and will continue on the islands of St. Thomas, St. John and Water Island respectively. Technicians completing the installation will also conduct a sound test of each siren as they are erected. The test should last less than a minute and will feature a 10-second chime followed by a pre-recorded 'Test' message, according to V.I.T.E.M.A.

New siren are being installed at the following locations:

St. Croix — Arthur A. Richards Junior High School, Cotton Valley, La Grande Princesse at the former Elena Christian Junior High School, Golden Rock at the John F. Kennedy Housing Community, and Southgate on the east end of the island. Two additional sites will be chosen in the next few weeks.

St. Thomas — Bolongo Bay, Bordeaux, Compass Point Marina, Hull Bay, Oceana Restaurant, Pilgrim's Terrace.

St. John — Calabash, Frank Bay, Hansen Bay, Rock Ridge Road, Francis Bay

Water Island — Catchment Hill, Crown Bay

In addition to the installation of new sirens, VITEMA will also upgrade the entire system to include pre-recorded alert messages in Spanish and French.

"One of our major concerns in delivering emergency messages is that the we have a number of people who do not speak English and will not understand the alert. If they do understand the alert then they may not react as quickly as they should," Ms. Barnes said. "This is an important step in addressing the non-English speaking population during a major emergency."

According to the release, over the past several years, V.I.T.E.M.A. has been continuously enhancing the USVI Tsunami Readiness Program to ensure the territory is prepared for this type of event. The Tsunami Readiness Program includes the implementation of the All Hazards Siren Warning System, an ongoing tsunami awareness campaign, the development of tsunami evacuation maps, and the installation of more than 100 tsunami zone signs throughout the territory. In 2014, the U.S.V.I. was granted Tsunami-Ready status by NOAA-National Weather Service.