

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Vigilant Guard: Mapp Participates In Mock Tsunami Drill

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ST. CROIX -- Picture this: A 7.1 magnitude earthquake has just struck the U.S. Virgin Islands, which immediately triggered a 20-foot tsunami, devastating Veterans Drive, the University of the Virgin Islands and the Water and Power Authority in St. Thomas. Multiple people are reported dead; the West Indian Company reports damage to its dock, and a cruise ship docked there is immobile, it too suffering damage. The Cyrille E. King Airport is badly damaged, making travel in and out of the island, difficult.

Compounding the havoc that had been reeked, a hurricane is heading in the territory's direction.

On St. Croix, WAPA is also out, though the impact of the tsunami is less severe on the big island. The Henry E. Rohlsen Airport suffered minor damage and remains operational -- serving as a hub between the U.S. mainland and the territory, as the Federal Emergency Management Agency supplies the territory with aid relief.

With the territory in shambles, Governor Kenneth Mapp -- at a podium erected at the back of the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency -- addresses the people, solemnly updating residents and the world on the ruin that had befall the U.S. Virgin Islands.

That's what took place today, albeit invented, as VITEMA and the VI National Guard lead the first ever Vigilant Guard event in the territory, occurring from May 15-19. Vigilant Guard is [a set of full scale disaster simulation exercises](#) coordinated by the U.S. Northern Command. Ongoing now in at least five U.S. jurisdictions, including the territory, the exercise was created to test a local government's ability to respond to a catastrophic event, looking closely at how officials coordinate the delivery of federal and military assets in support of emergency response operations.

Following the mock press conference, Mr. Mapp told The Consortium that there were benefits to it, among them improving how government and federal agencies mobilize. "The point is to get everybody on the same playbook so that there can be some adequate response," the governor said. He said there were discussions on data collection, designation of certain senators and other important decisions at a meeting held this morning, that would need be authorized in case of an emergency on the scale of the 20-foot tsunami.

The governor was to get a briefing, and later become incapacitated -- which would see Lieutenant Governor Osbert Potter leading the territory -- as part of the Vigilant Guard exercise today.

VITEMA Director Mona Barnes said valuable lessons were learned today, and areas that need improvement were magnified. "We do have to work on the communication as far as satellite phones," she said, making known that VITEMA eventually called the governor through satellite communication, though it took longer than they had hoped. VITEMA was also able to communicate with leadership at the VI National Guard. "So we know if our communication goes down, we'll definitely have some redundancy, so that was a good thing," she said.

VITEMA was able to successfully send an alert to the cellphone of Virgin Islanders at 7:45 a.m. this morning, and the siren alerts went off on time as well. But some government agencies that were called in immediately following the mock tsunami drill did not show up, with Ms. Barnes stating that the their inability to respond represented reality. "We are realistic to know that that is going to happen in a real scenario," she added.

Just before the mock press conference took place, there was a power outage that affected about 15,000 customers on St. Croix, WAPA said. Because of the outage, VITEMA's generator had to be switched on, making for a more realistic scenario for the drill, although at the expense of WAPA customers.

