

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Red Cross USVI Activates Hurricane Irma Preparedness Plan

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The American Red Cross of the Virgin Islands today initiated its preparedness plan due to the possible impact of Hurricane Irma in the territory. The organization also called on all families to prepare and to have in place their family emergency plans.

As part of its preparedness steps, the Red Cross implemented verification of all its equipment and supplies; it also verified volunteer availability and initiated conversations with emergency response agencies, the nonprofit said today.

“Besides being in the peak of the Hurricane Season, September is also known for being National Preparedness Month and with the threat of a strong hurricane, now is the time

families need to come together and prepare,” said Lee Vanessa Feliciano, regional executive of the American Red Cross Caribbean Region.

The Red Cross has a free app called "Emergency", for iOS and Android devices. With the app, a user can monitor conditions in their area or the area of their loved ones, have access to preparedness information, and let loved ones know that they are safe after an emergency.

Search for the Red Cross "Emergency" app, which is available in English and Spanish, in Apple's App Store and Google's Play Store in the apps section. For more information about preparedness, visit [redcross.org/prepare](https://www.redcross.org/prepare).

Hurricane Irma is now expected to be a category 4 storm when it arrives to the Leeward Islands, with storm watchers urging caution and advising those in the hurricane's potential path — including the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico — to get prepared.

According to the National Hurricane Center, at 5:00 a.m. today, the center of Hurricane Irma was located near latitude 18.2 North, longitude 36.5 West. Irma is moving toward the west-northwest near 12 mph (19 km/h). A turn toward the west is expected by tonight, followed by a turn toward the west-southwest on Saturday.

Dannielle Banks, a meteorologist with The Weather Channel, warned potential travelers to Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands neighbor, to reconsider their travel plans next week, as a potential path places the hurricane, which is expected to be a category 4 by then, near P.R. and the U.S.V.I. “Certainly, you need to monitor your interest in places like Puerto Rico too, if you were going to do some vacationing there in the middle of next week,” Ms. Banks warned.

The hurricane's maximum sustained winds remain near 115 mph (185 km/h) with higher gusts. Irma is a category 3 hurricane on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale. Fluctuations in strength, up or down, are possible during the next few days, but Irma is expected to remain a powerful hurricane through the weekend, said the National Hurricane Center.

Hurricane-force winds extend outward up to 15 miles (30 km) from the center, and tropical-storm-force winds extend outward up to 90 miles (150 km). The estimated minimum central pressure is 967 mb (28.56 inches).

VITEMA Director Mona Barnes on Thursday encouraged the Virgin Islands community to closely monitor weather reports on Hurricane Irma, and to be ready in the event the territory is placed under a hurricane watch or warning.

“Although there is still uncertainty with the track of Hurricane Irma, now is the time to make sure you are ready,” Ms. Barnes said Thursday. “Don't wait for a hurricane watch or warning to prepare. Stock up on emergency supplies now, make sure everyone in your home knows what to do in an emergency and stay informed about the weather.”

“We have been fortunate in the past few years. The territory has been spared from the type of devastation we have seen in Houston over the past several days. But we cannot afford to be complacent,” Ms. Barnes concluded.

