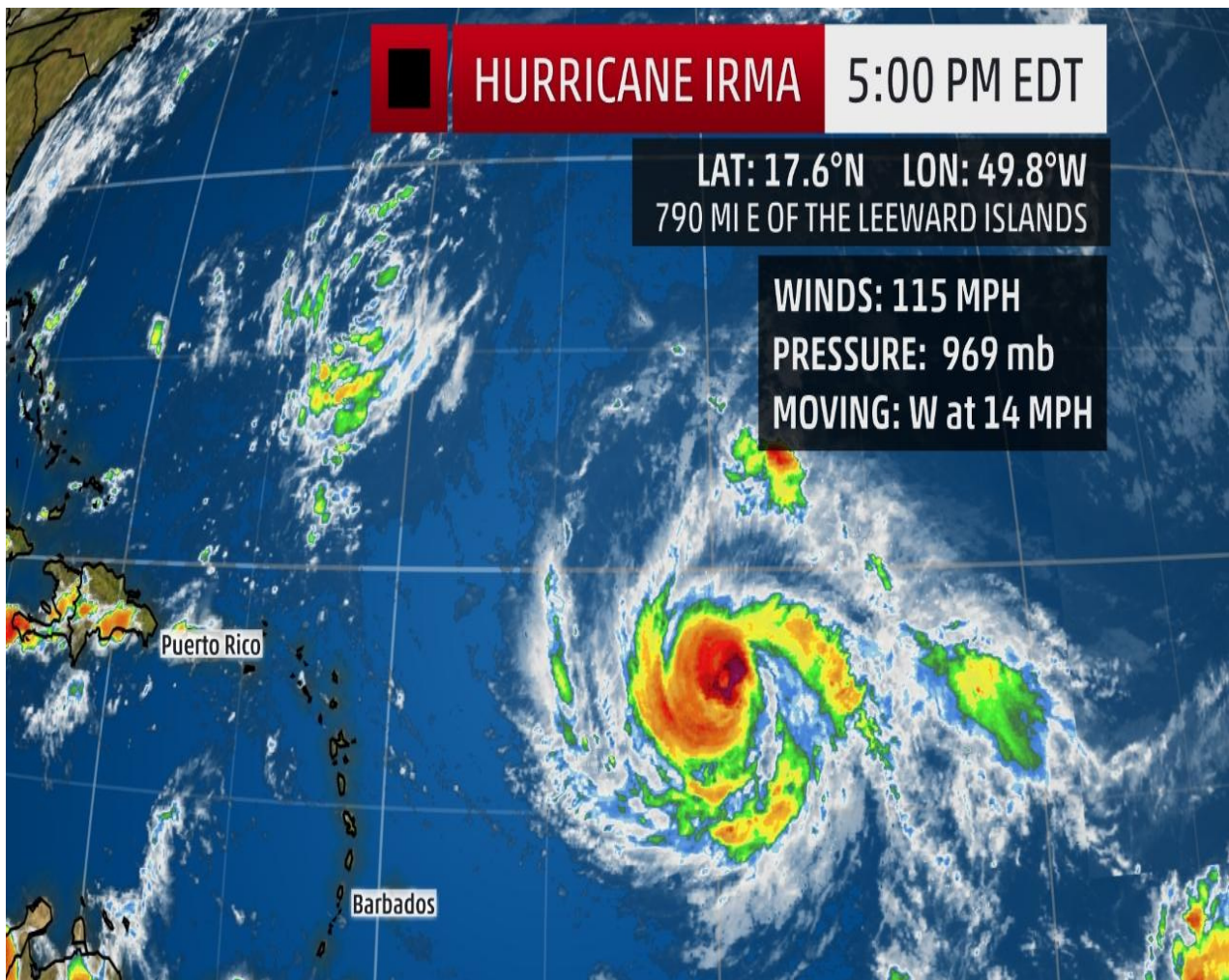


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Hurricane Watch Issued For 7 Islands; Irma Expected To Impact Northern Leeward Islands Late Tuesday

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Hurricane Irma, which on Sunday held steady at 115 miles per hour winds and is projected to grow in strength, is beginning to approach a number of islands and is expected to impact -- though how much remains uncertain -- the northern Leeward Islands, including the USVI and Puerto Rico, by late Tuesday, according to the National Hurricane Center (N.H.C.), which issued its latest forecast at 5:00 p.m.

The government of Antigua has issued a hurricane watch for the islands of Antigua and Barbuda, Anguilla, Montserrat, and St. Kitts and Nevis. The government of the Netherlands has issued a hurricane watch for the islands of Saba, St. Eustatius, and Saint Maarten. The government of France also issued a hurricane watch for Saint St.

Martin, as the island is owned by the both Netherlands and France.

N.H.C. urged interests in the remainder of the Leeward Islands, including the British and U.S. Virgin Islands as well as Puerto Rico, to monitor the progress of Irma. Additional hurricane and tropical storm watches may be required for portions of the aforementioned islands on Monday.

As of 5:00 p.m., the center of Hurricane Irma was located near latitude 17.6 North, longitude 49.8 West. Irma is moving toward the west near 14 mph (22 km/h). A westward to west-southwestward motion with some reduction in forward speed is expected through Monday night. On the forecast track, the center of Irma is forecast to approach the northern Leeward Islands late Tuesday, according to N.H.C.

Maximum sustained winds are near 115 mph (185 km/h) with higher gusts. Irma is a category 3 hurricane on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale. Some strengthening is forecast during the next 48 hours.

Hurricane-force winds extend outward up to 35 miles (55 km) from the center and tropical-storm-force winds extend outward up to 140 miles (220 km). The estimated minimum central pressure is 969 mb (28.62 inches).

Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency Director Mona Barnes, on Saturday encouraged the community to remain vigilant and to monitor weather reports on Hurricane Irma. In the event the U.S. Virgin Islands is placed under a hurricane watch or warning, the community is advised to ensure safety is paramount. Ms. Barnes strongly encouraged boaters and beachgoers to exercise extreme caution beginning today.

"Adequate preparation is critical. Ensure you and your family are informed and prepared. Your plans should also include family members with access and functional needs, as well as pets," she said. "Don't wait for a hurricane watch or warning to prepare. Now is the time to stock up on emergency supplies and medications. Prepare disaster kits, make sure everyone in your home knows what to do in an emergency and stay informed about the weather using credible sources of information. As a territory, we continue to do our very best to ensure the safety of the residents of the Virgin Islands."

The Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority said late Saturday that it's in "good shape" in terms of the preparations of its power plants and electrical and water distribution systems should Irma threaten the Virgin Islands.

"Over the last several days, we have been tracking the developing storm system, Hurricane Irma. Aside from regular discussions about the storm's possible threat with officials at V.I.T.E.M.A. [Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency], our management team has had readiness meetings with our on-site contractors about potential demobilization and work stoppage. We have also had discussions with our LPG terminal operators, VITOL, about their preparedness plans," Mr. Rhymer said.

Other preparations have been specific to the two power plants, in Krum Bay on St. Thomas and at Estate Richmond on St. Croix. "Our plant personnel have ensured there is an adequate supply of fuel required to generate electricity and are confident with the state of the two power plants to maintain functionality and be in a position to quickly resume power generation once a storm has passed," Mr. Rhymer said.

Mr. Rhymer noted that the authority remains in a state of readiness at all times for not only wind storms but any man-made or natural disaster that may impact W.A.P.A.'s facilities. "We continue to regularly review our emergency plans to ensure all is go for any response and recovery that may be required in the aftermath of a storm system befallen the territory," he said.

Mr. Rhymer said more specific messaging about W.A.P.A.'s operations during a storm, recovery of service after a storm incident and general safety reminders for the public will be issued as conditions warrant. "Right now, we are watching this powerful hurricane and preparing to launch our storm operational plan as circumstances require," he said.