

The Virgin Islands Consortium

First Day Of School Postponed; School Personnel Asked To Report Tuesday To Secure Classrooms

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Staff **September 04, 2017**



Update: Following a [hurricane watch](#) issued for the territory by the National Hurricane Center at 11:00 a.m. today, Government House announced that the first day of school has been postponed until further notice. The public was also advised to standby for updates, and school personnel have been asked to report to work Tuesday to secure classrooms.

Original Story: The Department of Education on Monday morning said while school reopening is still planned for Sept. 5, it had yet to make a decision on whether to move forward with the plan or keep schools closed, as Hurricane Irma barrels towards the territory. The storm is expected to arrive to the Leeward Islands -- which includes the

USVI -- late Tuesday.

"At this time, a decision has not been made regarding the opening of schools for the 2017-18 school year, slated for Tuesday, September 5," reads the D.O.E. release." The Department of Education is working closely with Government House and the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (V.I.T.E.M.A.) to monitor the hurricane's progress."

Hurricane Irma for the second day in a row has maintained its category 3 status with hurricane-force winds of 115 miles per hour, according to the National Hurricane Center's Monday 5:00 a.m. advisory. The storm, which is expected to gain strength as it arrives to the northern Leeward Islands, is following a west-southwest path, a direction that places it closer to Leeward Islands, including the U.S. Virgin Islands, the British Virgin Islands, as well as Puerto Rico.

And Irma is no longer a small storm; hurricane-force winds now extend outward up to 30 miles, while tropical storm-force winds extend to 140 miles. [Two days ago](#), tropical storm-force winds were measured to extend outward at most 80 miles. This means the closer the storm gets to the Leeward Islands, the greater chances of impact become.

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 today.

In the National Hurricane Center's 5:00 a.m. advisory, the eye of Hurricane Irma was located near latitude 16.9 North, longitude 52.3 West. Irma is moving toward the west-southwest near 14 mph (22 km/h). A turn toward the west is expected later today, followed by a west-northwestward turn late Tuesday. On the forecast track, the center of Irma will move closer to the Leeward Islands through Tuesday and then be near the northern Leeward Islands Tuesday night, 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-force winds extend outward up to 30 miles (45 km) from the center, and tropical-storm-force winds extend outward up to 140 miles (220 km). The estimated minimum central pressure is 961 mb (28.38 inches).person Hurricane Wind Scale. Some strengthening is forecast through Tuesday night.

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.