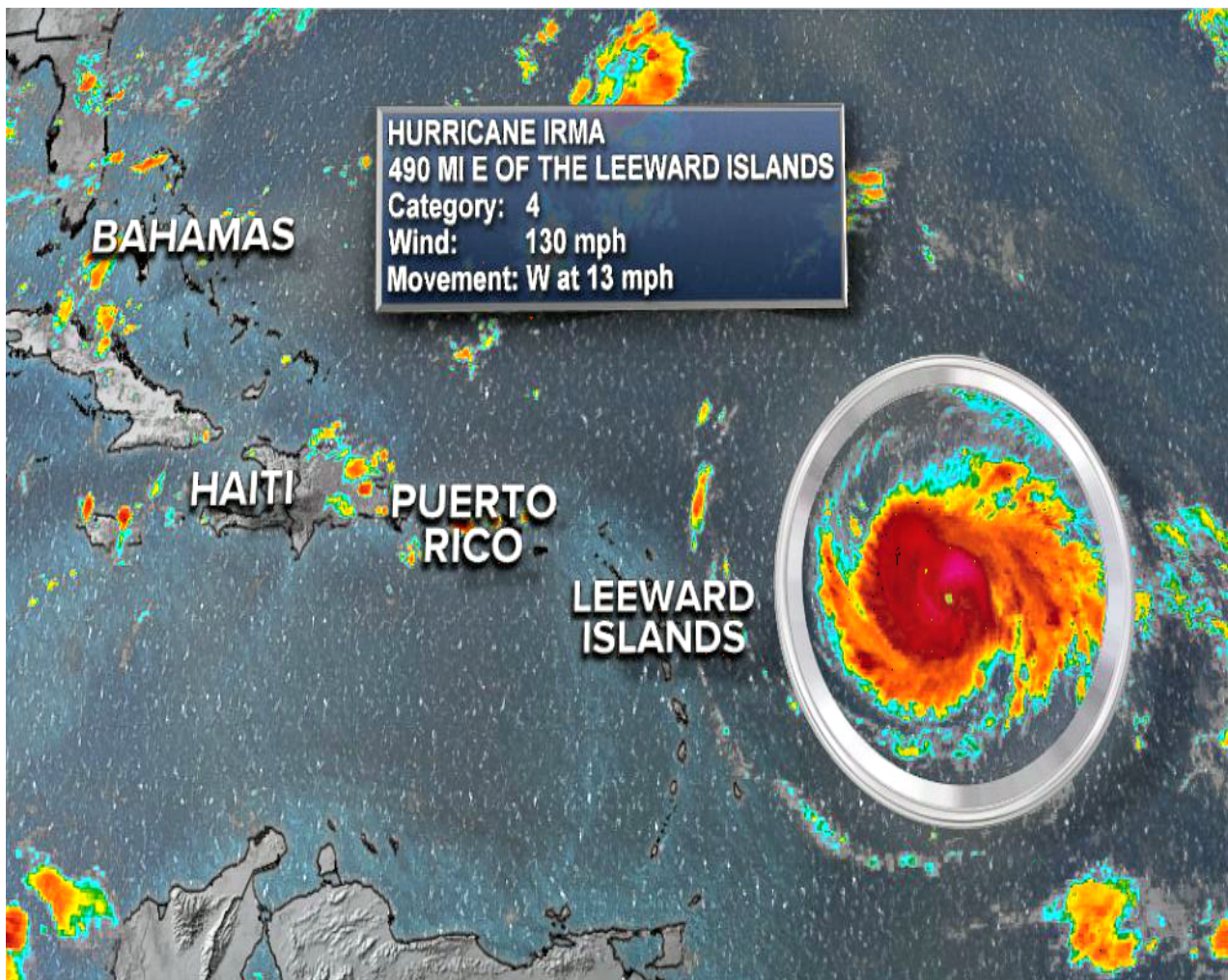


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Declares State Of Emergency Effective 12:01 A.M. Tuesday; Territory-Wide Hurricane Shelters Announced

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Hours after Governor Kenneth Mapp chided a constituent during a Government House press conference this afternoon, for asking why he hadn't declared a state of emergency in light of Hurricane Irma's growing strength and a trajectory that places the territory in its path, Mr. Mapp, through a release issued Monday night, said he had ordered that a state of emergency take effect at 12:01 a.m. Tuesday.

The constituent, a popular personality named Daren Stevens, pointed out that Puerto Rico had declared a state of emergency, and that it would be prudent of the territory to do

the same, as it would activate emergency response.

But Mr. Mapp scolded Mr. Stevens, stating that he would declare the state of emergency on his own timing. "I have nothing to do -- and I apologize -- I have nothing to do with what somebody else do. I have to do with what's important, what's needed for the people of the Virgin Islands, and then we will deploy what we need to do," Mr. Mapp said.

He added, "We don't want to be like Puerto Rico in a financial condition. I ain't following what the governor of Puerto Rico does, because he is responsible for the people of Puerto Rico."

Not too long after, the state of Florida, a week away from potential impact from Hurricane Irma, [declared a state of emergency](#) in preparation for the storm.

Hurricane Irma is now a category 4 storm whose path has shifted from its west-southwest direction, to a western trail, according to the National Hurricane Center's (N.H.C.) 5:00 p.m. advisory. The storm — with hurricane-force winds of near 130 miles per hour — is barreling towards the Leeward Islands, with hurricane watches and warnings being issued for well over a dozen islands by U.S., European and Caribbean authorities.

Mr. Mapp said residents should not panic. Instead, they should prepare for Irma's potential impact. "We have to be prepared. We have to take this event very seriously," he said.

He recommended all residents and visitors stay away from the beaches and asked hotels to advise guests to stay indoors during the weather system. More than 5,000 visitors are scheduled to remain in the territory over the next few days, Mr. Mapp said.

"Hurricanes are not part of the vacation experience," said the governor, cautioning visitors against going outside or attempting activities such as surfing during the inclement weather. "It's a very dangerous time and we don't want you going out."

Mr. Mapp assured the public that his cabinet is working with all relevant departments and entities to ensure preparations continue to be made. Beginning Tuesday, the Department of Human Services will have shelters open and prepared to house anyone in need.

Shelters on St. John Bethany Methodist Church Julius Sprauve School

Shelters on St. Thomas E. Benjamin Oliver School Lockhart Elementary Nisky Moravian Church Knud Hansen Complex Sugar Estate Head Start Special Needs: Community Health Center

Shelters on St. Croix St. Croix Educational Complex Herbert Grigg Home for the Aged Claude O. Markoe School

Sandbag distribution will continue at the locations below on Tuesday from 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Individuals requiring sandbags must arrive during this time, as no other opportunities to collect sandbags will be available after:

St. Croix:

- Department of Public Works, Anna's Hope
- Department of Public Works, Frederiksted
- Grove Fire Station
- Cotton Valley Fire Station
- Richmond Fire Station.

St. Thomas:

- Department of Public Works
- Bordeaux Fire Station
- Tutu Fire Station

St. John:

- Department of Public Works

Hospitals, the governor noted, are not shelters, and must be reserved for emergency care. He also advised the public to fill any necessary prescriptions today or early tomorrow. Ambulances will be positioned at fire stations across the Territory so they can mobilize quickly if needed.

Mr. Mapp advised residents to clear loose and potentially hazardous items surrounding their homes to limit debris that could become airborne in strong winds.

"It's a good time to do some spring cleaning," he said. The governor also recommended residents disconnect the downspout that feeds into their cisterns Tuesday to prevent salt, dirt and debris from contaminating the water supply, noting he would be doing that himself.

The first day of public school has been postponed until further notice. Government employee work closures are yet to be determined. The public is advised to stand by for updates in this regard.

The Government of the U.S. Virgin Islands will communicate with residents during the storm through local media, the Internet and social media. To stay informed of the latest updates affecting the territory, the public is advised to visit informusvi.com and to sign up for alerts at vialert.gov.

Other resources include: VITEMA - <https://www.facebook.com/vitema/> Government House - <https://www.facebook.com/GovernmentHouseUSVI/> The Department of Tourism - www.usviupdate.com

Mr. Mapp will hold a follow-up news conference tomorrow to deliver more information. A media advisory will be sent out with details.