

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Irma Wreaks Havoc In St. Thomas; Schneider Hospital Suffers 'Catastrophic Failure'

VIC News / **Published On September 06, 2017 11:40 PM /**

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ST. THOMAS -- Hurricane Irma, hours after exacting catastrophic damage on [St. Martin and Anguilla](#), made its way to St. Thomas during the late morning time of Wednesday, commencing what would be hours of pounding with lots of rain and hurricane-force winds, leaving many parts of the second largest of the U.S. Virgin Islands in shambles, with dozens of persons reporting destroyed roofs, flooding, collapsed homes and more.

The Schneider Regional Medical Center's roof was destroyed, according to a trusted government source, who was not sanctioned to speak officially. The government's Emergency Operation Command, a group recently created to lead Hurricane Irma emergency response, said the hospital relocated all patients from the third and fourth

floors to the second floor due to flooding caused by roof damage.

Samuel Topp, Government House's deputy communications director, told The Consortium Wednesday night that the entire hospital had been compromised. "One hospital official described the hospital as representing catastrophic failure," Mr. Topp said. He said planning and logistics were underway to evacuate the patient population at Schneider Hospital to a United States Military ship. "That has not been finalized and that is being contemplated as we speak," Mr. Topp said.

Mr. Topp, who was stationed command center, said the situation on St. Thomas is not only challenging, but has stressed location resources to the limit. "We are very fortunate that earlier this evening, President Trump [issued a declaration of emergency](#) that authorizes FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] to access and assist in deploying the emergency response capabilities that the federal government has now put into our service," Mr. Topp said. The assistance includes debris removal and emergency medical assistance, among other forms of aid.

Mr. Topp confirmed that emergency responders have been deployed to help Virgin Islanders in need. He said the governor was concerned about the safety of the first responders, and had previously ordered the rescuers to take shelter while hurricane-force winds battered St. Thomas.

Mr. Mapp, currently on St. Croix, is planning a trip to the St. Thomas-St. John district on Friday, pending travel means are available, according to Mr. Topp. As for St. John, The Consortium is awaiting a response from Government House on the island's condition.

Mr. Mapp reported this afternoon that many homes and businesses have lost their roofs, particularly in the north-eastern quadrant of St. Thomas. He said at least 12 inches of rain had fallen as of 4:00 p.m.

The Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority lost its generating capacity. Cellphone communication has also been affected in St. Thomas. However, Whatsapp and texting might work.

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Flooding compromised conditions at two emergency shelters, according to the government's command center. Reports indicate that water was rising at the E. Benjamin Oliver Elementary School Shelter and the Eldra Schulerbrandt Facility.

There were two reported injuries thus far: A collapsing roof at the Lima Company Fire Station in Annas Retreat caused minor injuries to an emergency medical technician and a firefighter. The roof collapsed and blocked Fire and Rescue vehicles.

The governor said President Trump has offered his personal and official assurance to the people of the territory. Mr. Mapp plans to ask the president for a disaster declaration early tomorrow.

According to the National Hurricane Center's (N.H.C.) 5:00 p.m. advisory, the eye of Hurricane Irma was located near latitude 18.8 North, longitude 65.4 West. Irma is moving toward the west-northwest near 16 mph (26 km/h), and this general motion is expected to

continue for the next couple of days. On the forecast track, the extremely dangerous core of Irma will pass just north of Puerto Rico tonight, pass near or just north of the coast of Hispaniola Thursday, and be near the Turks and Caicos and southeastern Bahamas by Thursday evening.

Maximum sustained winds are near 185 mph (295 km/h) with higher gusts. Irma is a category 5 hurricane on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale. Some fluctuations in intensity are likely during the next day or two, but Irma is forecast to remain a powerful category 4 or 5 hurricane during the next couple of days.

Hurricane-force winds extend outward up to 50 miles (85 km) from the center and tropical-storm-force winds extend outward up to 185 miles (295 km). A wind gust to 62 mph (100 km/h) has been recently reported at San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Feature Image: A gas station in St. Thomas destroyed by Hurricane Irma.