

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Irma Leaves Four Dead So Far In St. Thomas

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Ernice Gilbert **September 07, 2017**



ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp confirmed at a late Thursday press conference that so far, four people have been confirmed dead in St. Thomas in the wake of Hurricane Irma, adding that there was a high likelihood that more bodies would be found.

"Part of the recovery process involves going through properties and going through neighborhoods, and so far, I can confirm that so far we've identified at least four fatalities," Mr. Mapp said. "I will not venture to say what was the cause of the fatalities; they clearly occurred during the course of the event," he added, referring to Hurricane Irma -- the 185 mile-per-hour storm that laid waste to St. Thomas on Wednesday. Mr. Mapp said the number is expected to increase as first responders continue their search and rescue efforts. "I'm advised that I should not be surprised to hear that there's more; I

don't know that there will be any massive numbers, but this was a significant event leaving significant destruction in its path," he said.

The governor also said his administration was not ready to reveal the communities in which the bodies were found, telling The Consortium that, "We can't answer all the questions this early out."

The tragic news is sure to heighten the fear of relatives who live abroad and have not been able to make contact with their loved ones in St. Thomas. The Consortium has been inundated by people whose family members were caught in the storm, some in tears, searching for any clue that would put their minds at ease.

William Vogel, federal coordinating officer of FEMA Region II, which encompasses the states of New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and the Native American tribes in the region, broke down while speaking at the press conference. "I can't tell you how much the federal family understands what position you're in, and we will do our best to be able to provide you with everything that you need," Mr. Vogel managed, after offering sympathies.

At the Thursday press conference, which was held at Government House on St. Croix, Mr. Mapp said the newly formed Emergency Operations Command (E.O.C.), which serves as a centralized point to receive and disseminate information, and to adequately deploy resources, would create a system through which family members could begin identifying their loved ones.

The governor had planned on visiting St. Thomas today, and apologized for not being able to make it. He stressed that his administration and federal partners have been working incessantly to assure that affected Virgin Islanders receive adequate relief. He said all federal resources relative to Hurricane Irma will be routed to the St. Thomas-St. John District, as St. Croix was already returning to some level of normalcy.

Mr. Mapp said the damage in some areas of St. John appeared to be worse than the havoc Hurricane Irma exacted on St. Thomas. Mona Barnes, the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency, confirmed tonight that "a couple of the ferries have actually sunk," quoting the captain of the district's ports who, she said, also stated that all the ports in the district were closed as of late Thursday.

Noting that Virgin Islanders were in a unique and favorable position to be U.S. citizens, Mr. Mapp confirmed that President Donald Trump had approved his administration's request for disaster declaration, which qualifies the territory for substantial federal dollars as the islands work to rebuild from the devastation that was Hurricane Irma.

The governor called off a curfew on St. Croix, but kept it active in St. Thomas. He also requested that all government employees return to work -- including teachers, even though students will stay home for the remainder of the week -- and urged St. Thomians to stay adhere to the curfew as crews continued their work.

The roofs of homes, hotels, gas stations and even Government House, were ripped off their frames, making room for strong winds to batter items on the inside, along with the incessant pouring of rain (Mr. Mapp reported 12 inches had fallen in the St. Thomas-St. John District as of 4:00 p.m. Wednesday).

Suddenly, buildings that were once considered safe turned into entrapment structures, sending their dwellers into panic, even as the water continued to rise, and the terrifying sound of the Irma's wind gnawed. Human instinct forced the hurricane victims into survival mode, and some corralled themselves in areas of the compromised structures deemed the most protective.

Soon after, the distress calls came pouring in: "I need help for my mom after storm passes, she is in Wintberg. House is in bad shape — windows and doors gone; she is in a closet. Glass and water everywhere- I need help to get her out of there once this is over, please. I need to get her somewhere dry. She is 1-22 Wintberg, St. Thomas. She is 83 years old. Her roof is gone — just a pile of rubble," wrote Sarah Beck, a post that was [widely shared](#).

"My mom needs help. She's on STJ, 16-5 George Simmons Terrace. Last I heard from her she was hiding in a closet and water was rising up through the floor from the cistern. Glass door and windows busted," wrote [Chezni Charles](#).

"My mom is stuck with flooding up to her knees and more water pouring in. If anyone can please help Eril Mitcham. Mountain Top Condo 11- D. St Thomas," wrote Angie White. Moments later, a neighbor of Ms. White's mother, offered to help. "We live right by and can send help," offered Meredith Butala.

These stories were unique in their own right, yet similar in many ways as they all brought to light the destruction Irma left in its wake.