

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Here's How The U.S. Dept. Of Interior And Federal Government Have Been Helping USVI Post Irma

VIC News / **Published On September 13, 2017 05:47 PM /**

Staff **September 13, 2017**



WASHINGTON -- The Department of the Interior is expediting all possible support and assistance to the government of the U.S. Virgin Islands and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (F.E.M.A.) in the wake of destruction from Hurricane Irma, D.O.I. announced Tuesday.

F.E.M.A. continues to lead the efforts of D.O.I. and others in the federal family to support territorial, tribal, local, private-sector, and non-profit partners to address the catastrophic impacts of Hurricane Irma on the islands as well as the mainland.

“The Department of the Interior actions in the USVI are part of our responsibility for federal policy related to the U.S. territories,” said U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke. “We commend the cooperative actions of the White House, USVI government, FEMA and the whole federal family to provide urgent relief to the Virgin Islands.”

Mr. Zinke and Acting Assistant Secretary for Insular Areas Nikolao Pula, applauded and expressed support for President Donald Trump and his White House for their efforts in ensuring the U.S. Virgin Islanders receive the assistance and support needed to recover from Hurricane Irma. The secretary and the acting assistant secretary have also personally pledged their support to Governor Kenneth Mapp of the U.S Virgin Islands towards recovery efforts.

Interior [has expedited](#) an advance payment of \$223 million to the USVI for estimated FY 2018 rum excise tax collections —providing money to the USVI quickly so that its government can cover normal operations and focus on emergency operations.

F.E.M.A recently transferred more than 146,000 liters of water, nearly 443,000 meals, and 56 rolls of tarp to the Virgin Islands National Guard for the territory to distribute to individuals at Points of Distribution. F.E.M.A. also is coordinating debris removal, search and rescue efforts, medical teams and other federal family efforts. Federal assistance is being provided to address health and evacuation needs due to major destruction at hospitals. The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) is conducting search and rescue operations in the U.S. Virgin Islands. U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) is providing search and rescue capabilities to the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico to assist with lifesaving and life-sustaining efforts. Army Corps of Engineers is providing coordination and execution of debris removal for St. Thomas.

Interior’s Office of Emergency Management (OEM), through the Emergency Management Council (EMC), is coordinating with all bureaus and offices to ensure that information and support needs to USVI are addressed in a collaborative way within the Department. OEM’s Interior Operations Center (IOC) is serving as the Department’s single point for collection and distribution of information related to the response and recovery efforts. OEM also has personnel deployed to FEMA’s coordination centers to ensure that the Department’s activities are integrated to address the priorities of the government of the USVI.

Interior’s Office of Insular Affairs (OIA) is working with the USVI government and FEMA to identify federal technical expertise and financial assistance that may be available to help get public facilities and services back up. OIA will continue working on hurricane

recovery with the U.S. Treasury and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, as well as with other federal agencies such as the Department of Homeland Security, Health & Human Services, the Department of Labor and the Department of Agriculture. OIA has directed numerous individual inquiries to FEMA and related disaster-coordinating efforts in support of the federal government's continued life-saving activities for the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Other Interior agencies with offices in the USVI also are helping with recovery efforts, which are being hampered by communication problems and the fact that virtually all of St. Thomas and St. John remain without power except for a handful of locations serviced by underground feeders, such as the Cyril E. King International Airport and the Roy Schneider Medical Center.

The National Park Service Eastern Incident Management Team is coordinating recovery operations at the USVI parks. Virgin Islands National Park on the island of St. John sustained significant damage, the full extent of which is still being determined. Power has been restored to the park visitor center and emergency crews are working to re-establish communication lines. Parks located on the island of St. Croix (Christiansted National Historic Site and Salt River Bay National Historical Park) suffered less damage; they have external water and sporadic power. The team will initially focus on providing support for affected employees, damage assessments of park facilities, and debris removal at parks.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service USVI national wildlife refuges – Buck Island, Green Cay, and Sandy Point – as well as the Caribbean Refuge Complex headquarters in Puerto Rico are closed, but FWS has been undertaking recovery and support efforts as soon as possible.

The U.S. Geological Survey will be aiding with collecting high-water marks as soon as staff can get into the field.