

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Thomas Airport Reopening For Commercial Flights Delayed; New York Governor Pledges 30 State Troopers, 100 Guardsmen To USVI; Feds Agree To Foot 90 Percent Of Permanent Repairs Cost

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Governor Kenneth Mapp announced during his Friday post Hurricane Irma press briefing that the planned September 16 reopening for commercial flights from carriers such as Delta, American and Jetblue at the Cyril E. King Airport in St. Thomas, was pushed back, as damage to the roof is preventing the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) from operating its equipment, and repairs to the roof were hampered further by today's heavy showers.

Mr. Mapp, along with Dept. of Tourism and Port Authority officials, are hoping for a reopening next week, although no solid date was announced. Even so, local and regional travel, to include Puerto Rico, will be allowed to operate along with chartered flights and the military, the governor said.

In encouraging news, the governor announced that Washington had approved his request for the federal government to burden all or most of the cost of damage caused by Hurricane Irma. The governor, after being queried by The Consortium about sustaining the government and critical services after such a devastating weather event -- even as the government had been barely maintaining liquidity before, and as its main product, tourism, has been damaged by Hurricane Irma -- Mr. Mapp said he would apply for provisions under the [Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act](#). The governor said his request was approved from part C through G, which makes provision for 90 percent of all permanent repair cost territory-wide to be footed by the federal government, according to the governor.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo landed on St. Thomas today, where he met with Mr. Mapp and visited some locations walloped by Irma. After seeing the damage firsthand, Mr. Cuomo upped his pledge to include 100 National Guard troops, 30 state troopers, humvees, and a vehicle called a 'gator', which can access areas difficult to reach, the governor said.

Mr. Cuomo also pledged administrative assistance in navigating the local and federal bureaucracies involved with disaster relief accounting and other procedures.

Mr. Mapp mentioned former New York mayor, Michael Bloomberg, thanking Mr. Bloomberg for the technical assistance his team has been offering the territory. The U.S.V.I.'s chief executive said the former mayor -- whose partner owns a home in St. John that was destroyed by Hurricane Irma -- pledged financial support as well, although a dollar amount was not mentioned.

Mr. Mapp said additional Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC) agreements were signed with four states: Alabama, New York, Kentucky and Puerto Rico. EMAC is a mutual aid agreement between states and territories of the United States. It enables states to share resources during natural and man-made disasters, including terrorism.

The governor on Thursday announced that Tutu High was being completely evacuated. Today, he announced that the current building would be demolished to make room for structures with codes better suited to withstand hurricanes and similar weather events. "We have to build homes that can withstand hurricanes," he said.

The cruise line industry, an integral part of the Virgin Islands tourism experience, has pledged 200 self-sustained cottages called home pods, to be distributed to some Hurricane Irma victims (see example below). Mr. Mapp directed the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency's (V.I.T.E.M.A.) director, Mona Barnes, to seek out the most "distressed" families for the pods.

[View the original embedded media](#)

The governor said he was told that about 13,000 additional tarps had arrived to St. Thomas and would be offloaded tomorrow. He said his administration will be welcoming a lot more U.S. government officials, so they could see firsthand the damage caused by Irma.

Part of the strategy is to convince these officials that the current power distribution system, which sees power lines being latched to poles, only to be knocked down by hurricanes, is not sustainable. Mr. Mapp is advocating for a setup that sees the distribution system running underground, so as to prevent immense power damage, and quicker recovery. The current model is also more costly overtime, the governor said.

The buzzword is "how can we build more resiliency, how can we build and accept that hurricanes are a part of our lives" and build accordingly, Mr. Mapp said.

The territory's leader plans on meeting with the Legislature on Wednesday to update the lawmakers on his administration's progress, and also to lobby for legislation Mr. Mapp says are needed to push the recovery effort forward.

Relative to VITEMA, Ms. Barnes said a 20-foot trailer with ice would soon be in St. Thomas. The trailer will be offloaded in St. John and the ice will be released to a variety of distribution centers on both islands. The plan, according to Ms. Barnes, is to station 20-foot containers with supplies at each distribution center, which grew by three overnight for a total of eight in St. Thomas.

The distribution center locations in St. Thomas are: Bordeaux, Kirwan Terrance, Brown Fire Station, Tutu Fire Station, Northside, the Legislature, the government parking lot, and Eudora Kean, according to Ms. Barnes. All distribution centers will have Meals Ready to Eat (MREs) and water -- and as soon as tarps are offloaded, they will be placed at the distribution centers, Ms. Barnes said.

The V.I.T.E.M.A. director said she was contacted by the National Weather Service for a briefing on a new storm brewing in the Atlantic that may impact the territory in five days.

Mr. Mapp said WAPA continues to make advances in power on St. Thomas and St. John. He also said that his decision to add two extra hours to the curfew appeared to be working, as lines have become shorter and the flow of traffic better.

As for the MREs, the governor said they should be distributed to families with a giving spirit, not stingily as if they were being rationed. "I'm not worried about anybody hoarding MREs; 900,000 more are coming into the territory. We rather you have more provisions than have less provisions," he said.

As part of a rotation plan, V.I.P.D. Commissioner Delroy Richards said some officers from St. Croix were returned to that island, while others from St. Croix were deployed to the St. Thomas-St. John District.

The commissioner spoke of a shortcoming in the patrolling of Coral Bay, caused by roads made impassible by landslides and other impediments. However, along with federal partners, the patrol continues throughout St. John, the commissioner said.

As of today, F.E.M.A. has sent more than 582,000 meals and 380,000 liters of water to the USVI for the response effort. These basic commodities, along with cots, diapers, baby formula, temporary roofing materials and other necessities, are going to local Points of distribution in St. John and St. Thomas and to shelters operated by our recovery partner the American Red Cross and others. Additional commodities are arriving on a daily basis.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and the Departments of Defense (DoD), and Health and Human Services (HHS) are some of the federal agencies participating in the massive federal effort to assist the Virgin Islands and its people

The Coast Guard cutter fleet from Sector San Juan, along with other Coast Guard cutters, are supporting Hurricane Irma relief efforts by providing maritime security, assisting with port assessments, as well as transporting supplies, equipment, Coast Guard teams and other government agency responders to St. John and St. Thomas. USCG is also working with Virgin Island and federal responders on coordinating the transportation of people who need to be evacuated from the island.

For the first time in history HHS medical personnel were embedded with DoD search and rescue teams to evacuate dialysis patients requiring treatment from USVI. Additional HHS personnel are providing medical assistance at hospitals in St. Thomas and St. John. In all, approximately 10,000 DoD and 100 HHS personnel are supporting response operations in the USVI and Puerto Rico.

The September 7 presidential disaster declaration for the Virgin Islands makes federal assistance available to eligible homeowners, renters and business owners affected by Hurricane Irma in St. John and St. Thomas.

Survivors who sustained uninsured or underinsured Irma-related damage to their homes, vehicles, personal property, business or its inventory beginning Sept. 6, 2017, and continuing should register for assistance.

Registration can be completed online at www.DisasterAssistance.gov, in Spanish at www.DisasterAssistance.gov/es, or by phone at **1-800-621-3362** or **(TTY) 1-800-462-7585**. Those who use 711-Relay or Video Relay Services may call 1-800-621-3362.

The toll-free telephone numbers operate from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. seven days a week (local time) until further notice. Operators are standing by to assist survivors in English, Spanish and many other languages.