

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Tropical Storm Maria Projected To Hit USVI As Hurricane; Mapp Issues Urgent Warning To USVI: Head To Shelters, Batten Down

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Less than two weeks after Hurricane Irma left St. Thomas and St. John -- along with a slew of other Caribbean Islands -- in a ruinous state, Tropical Storm Maria, projected by the National Hurricane Center (N.H.C.) to become a hurricane early next week, is expected to hit St. Croix directly, or pass between St. Thomas and St. Croix on Tuesday morning, with hurricane-force winds of about 100-120 miles per hour, according to Governor Kenneth Mapp, citing the N.H.C.

The governor's tone from the onset of the press briefing, which he has held daily following Hurricane Irma's ravaging of St. Thomas and St. John, conveyed a sense of urgency; Mr. Mapp said residents in the St. Thomas-St. John District should "seriously consider going to a shelter."

"My advice to folks on St. Thomas and St. John is not stay in your broken homes," Mr. Mapp said.

According to the N.H.C, at 5:00 p.m. today, the center of Tropical Storm Maria was located near latitude 12.3 North, longitude 52.6 West. Maria is moving toward the west near 20 mph (31 km/h). A slower west-northwest motion is expected during the next couple of days. On the forecast track, Maria is expected to approach the Leeward Islands on Monday.

The governor stated bluntly that tarpaulins would be no good against winds upwards 50 miles per hour. "If the eye is south of St. Croix, it means the U.S.V.I. is going to be in some of the strongest winds; tarps will be of very little use -- they can be taken down by 50-mile-per-hour winds," Mr. Mapp said.

#### **Shelters**

#### **St. Thomas-St. John District**

Knud Hansen (Special Needs will be co-located at this shelter)  
Lockhart School (maxed out)  
Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School

#### **St. John**

Guy Benjamin in Coral Bay

Bethany Moravian Church (Julius Sprauve School in St. John is being evacuated)

#### **St. Croix**

Educational Complex

Canegata Ballpark facility

Herbert Grigg

The governor said meals ready to eat (MREs) and water being provided at distribution centers will be quadrupled on Sunday and Monday, as the centers will be closed after Monday in anticipation of the storm. The distribution center locations in St. Thomas are: Kirwan Terrace Ballpark, Tutu Fire Station, Hotel Company Fire Station (Lover's Lane), Dorothea Fire Station, Bordeaux Fire Station and the Ivanna Eudora Kean High School, Dept. of Education, the government parking lot and at the Legislature. On St. John, they are the Coral Bay Fire Station and the Winston Wells Ballpark.

The temporary hospital setup outside the Schneider Regional Medical Center, which are housed in tents, will be dismantled until the storm passes, according to the governor.

"We're going to be scared, we are going to be anxious, but we have to make the decision now while we have the chance to do that," Mr. Mapp said, referring to the importance of residents preparing themselves for Maria.

The governor announced a temporary change in the curfew, which he said would allow residents in the St. Thomas-St. John District to do last-minute preparations. For Sunday and Monday only, curfew hours now 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m.

Mr. Mapp also announced the closure of schools for Monday, but required professional staff to report to work to secure schools. Schools are expected to be closed on Tuesday as well, which is when the storm is projected to make landfall in the territory.

The governor urged residents to stock up on at least four days worth of food items, and incessantly stressed the importance of families being prepared, with those who are not confident in the integrity of their houses being encouraged to head to shelters. "Listen, concentrate on your family and the protection of yourselves. Don't worry about your property, don't worry about your earthly belongings. Tomorrow is Sunday, pray for the USVI, pray for your families," the governor said.

Rumors of an order of evacuation of St. John were debunked at the press briefing, but the governor said if St. Johnians want to evacuate the island, they are free to do so.

Police Commissioner Delroy Richards said the department had learned from its Hurricane Irma response and would be better prepared for Maria. He said officers will be strategically positioned on all three islands for quick response time and, in case of criminal activity, ready to make arrests.

Brigadier General Deborah Howell clarified that while National Guard members both local and abroad (brought through the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or F.E.M.A.), will cease efforts during the storm, once the storm passes, they will be prepared to respond accordingly -- as they've done for Hurricane Irma. The brigadier general was clarifying the notion that F.E.M.A. would simply up and leave locals to fend for themselves.

"It does not mean we're getting out," she said. "We're going to do all that we can until it gets to a point where we can't do anything anymore."

According to N.H.C. Maria's maximum sustained winds had increased to near 50 mph (85 km/h) with higher gusts as of 5:00 p.m. today. Additional strengthening is expected during the next 48 hours, and Maria is forecast to be a hurricane when it approaches the Leeward Islands early next week. Tropical-storm-force winds extend outward up to 45 miles (75 km) from the center. The estimated minimum central pressure is 1002 mb (29.59 inches).

A hurricane watch is in effect for Antigua, Barbuda, St. Kitts, Nevis, and Montserrat. A tropical storm watch is in effect for St. Lucia, Martinique and Guadeloupe, Dominica, Barbados, St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

**Wind:** Hurricane conditions are possible within the hurricane watch area by Monday night or Tuesday, with tropical storm conditions possible on Monday. Tropical storm conditions are possible in the tropical storm watch area on Monday.

**Storm Surge:** A dangerous storm surge accompanied by large and destructive waves will raise water levels by as much as 3 to 5 feet above normal tide levels within the hurricane watch area.

**Rainfall:** Maria is expected to produce total rain accumulations of 6 to 12 inches with isolated maximum amounts of 20 inches across portions of the central and southern Leeward Islands through Tuesday night. Rainfall amounts of 2 to 4 inches with isolated maximum amounts of 8 inches will be possible for portions of the northern Leeward Islands through Tuesday night. These rains could cause life-threatening flash floods and mudslides.

**SURF:** Swells generated by Maria are expected to begin affecting the Lesser Antilles by Sunday night. These swells are likely to cause life-threatening surf and rip current conditions. Please consult products from your local weather office.