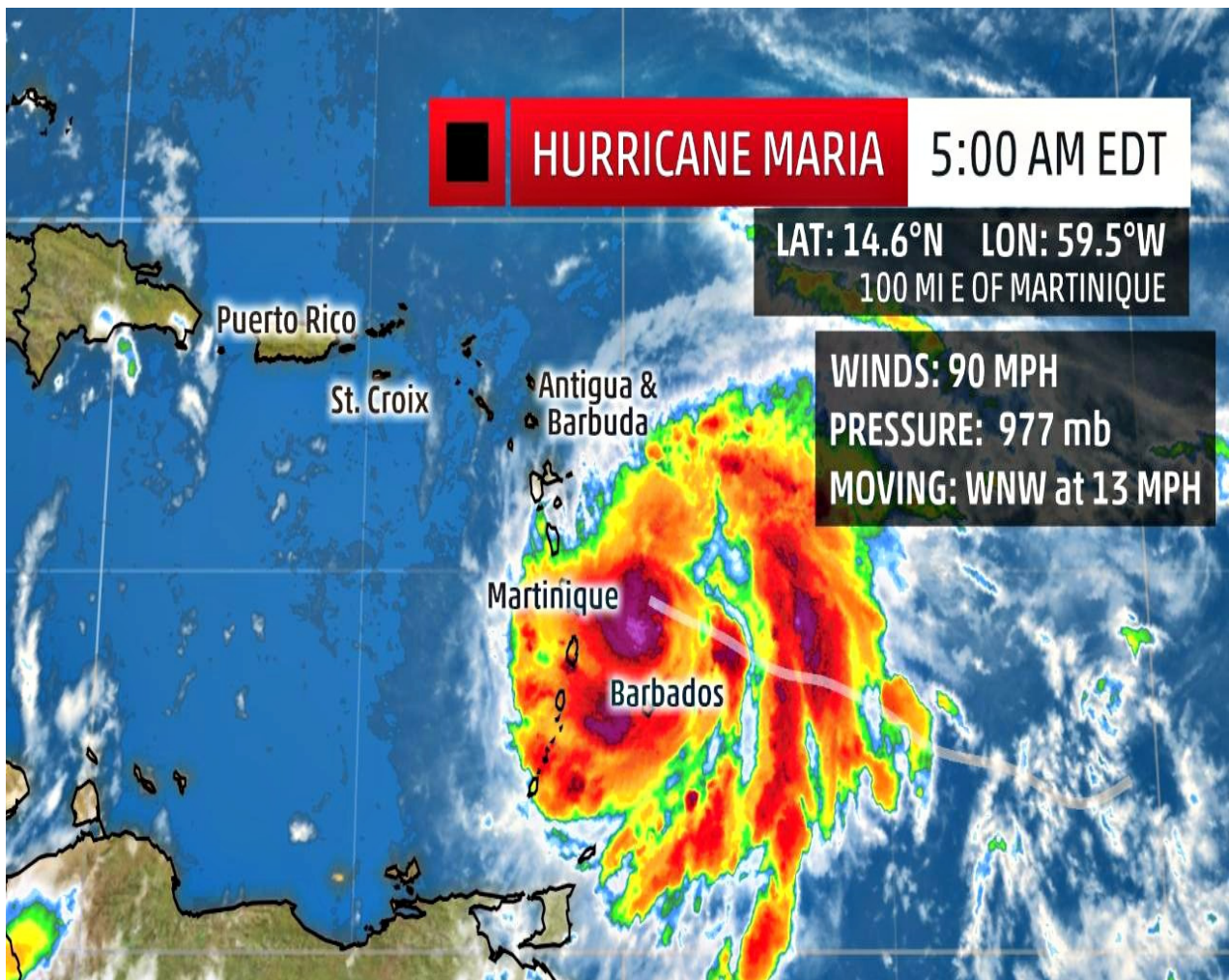


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Prayers Go Up As Maria Expected To Hit USVI As 'Major, Dangerous' Hurricane

Weather Updates / **Published On September 18, 2017 11:57 AM /**

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People across the U.S. Virgin Islands, feeling helpless in the face of a storm that is expected to grow into a "[major, dangerous hurricane](#)" before it makes landfall here -- and as residents in the [St. Thomas-St. John](#) District were attempting to rebuild their lives following Irma's destruction less than two weeks ago -- have turned to prayer, asking God to divert the storm away from the islands.

The call for action from the almighty lays bare the frustration that has set in as people living in the archipelago, many of whom have lost everything, fear that the islands -- tropical destinations that thrive on their tourism product -- are being ruined by destructive storms. Almost all of St. Martin, both Dutch and French, has been destroyed by

Hurricane Irma. Anguilla was flattened, the B.V.I. was devastated, Barbuda was made uninhabitable, with the island's prime minister stating after Irma's passage, "looked like a landfill." About 80 percent of St. John sustained heavy damage, and about 50 percent of St. Thomas.

Now, as if in a nightmare that won't end, islanders are faced with Hurricane Maria, whose 48-hour projection is causing concern, as it is expected to see "significant strengthening," according to the National Hurricane Center's (N.H.C.) 5:00 a.m. advisory. The storm is expected to become a major hurricane by tonight or early Tuesday, according to the N.H.C.

"Praying for God's divine intervention and hoping that the storm spare the islands," petitioned Janice Jackson Mason, on The Consortium's [Facebook platform](#). Her comment was liked over 200 times, with about 20 replies of "amen."

"Praying and asking God to let Maria remain a tropical storm. If it does make it to land in St. Croix and the other Caribbean islands, praying for rain with no devastation. Lord asking for protection once again for my homeland and everyone along the path," was Valerie Samaroo's request to God.

But the storm is predicted to hit the U.S.V.I. with major force, with St. Croix, this go around, receiving the brunt of the hurricane. Mr. Mapp has urged his constituents to prepare themselves, get sandbags (distribution of sandbags will occur today at Public Works in Anna's Hope and Public Works in Frederiksted beginning at 8:30 a.m.), and stock up on food supplies for at least four days. In the St. Thomas-St. John District, the governor urged residents to abandon their compromised homes for shelters. So dire was the governor's warning, that he told those intent on defying his order to write their names and Social Security number on their bodies, so as to be easily identified by the government. "Take this event seriously. You cannot stay in those facilities, you will not survive," Mr. Mapp said.

Today could well be the last day before Hurricane Maria makes landfall that people will be allowed to make last-minute preparations. The governor is expected to declare a state of emergency, which oftentimes include a curfew, and has requested from the White House that a disaster declaration -- [as it did with Hurricane Irma](#) -- be declared for the U.S.V.I. before Maria arrives.

The storm is now expected to start affecting the U.S. Virgin Islands late Tuesday afternoon and into the evening, with hurricane-force winds beginning at about midnight through Wednesday morning. And while the St. Thomas-St. John District may be spared the strongest winds according to the current forecast, the winds there are still projected to be at least at tropical storm-strength, along with torrential rainfall.

The governor said public schools are closed today, Tuesday and Wednesday, with an assessment of the facilities being made after the storm passes to determine when a reopening date.

According to N.H.C.'s 5:00 a.m. advisory, the center of Hurricane Maria was located near latitude 14.6 North, longitude 59.5 West. Maria is moving toward the west-northwest near 13 mph (20 km/h), and this motion with a decrease in forward speed is expected through

Tuesday night. On the forecast track, the center of Maria will move across the Leeward Islands late today and tonight and then over the extreme northeastern Caribbean Sea Tuesday and Tuesday night.

Maximum sustained winds are near 90 mph (150 km/h) with higher gusts. Significant strengthening is forecast during the next 48 hours, and Maria is expected to become a dangerous major hurricane before it moves through the Leeward Islands. Hurricane-force winds extend outward up to 15 miles (30 km) from the center and tropical-storm-force winds extend outward up to 105 miles (165 km). The estimated minimum central pressure is 977 mb (28.85 inches).

Along with the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Vieques and Culebra were placed under hurricane watch.

Hurricane watches and warnings:

A hurricane watch was issued for the U.S. Virgin Islands, the British Virgin Islands, Saba and St. Eustatius, St. Martin (Dutch and French), St. Barthelemy and Anguilla.

A hurricane warning was issued for Guadeloupe, Dominica, St. Kitts and Nevis, and Montserrat.

A tropical storm warning is in effort for Barbados, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Wind: Hurricane conditions are first expected within portions of the Leeward Islands by Monday night, with tropical storm conditions beginning on Monday. Hurricane conditions are possible within the hurricane watch area by Tuesday, with tropical storm conditions possible Monday night. Tropical storm conditions are possible in the tropical storm watch area Monday or Monday night.

Rainfall: Maria is expected to produce total rain accumulations of 6 to 12 inches with isolated maximum amounts of 20 inches across the Leeward Islands, including Puerto Rico and the U.S. and British Virgin Islands through Wednesday night. Maria is also expected to produce total rain accumulations of 2 to 4 inches for the northern and central Windward Islands. In all the above areas, these rainfall amounts could cause life-threatening flash floods and mudslides.

Surf: Swells generated by Maria are affecting the Lesser Antilles. These swells are likely to cause life-threatening surf and rip current conditions.