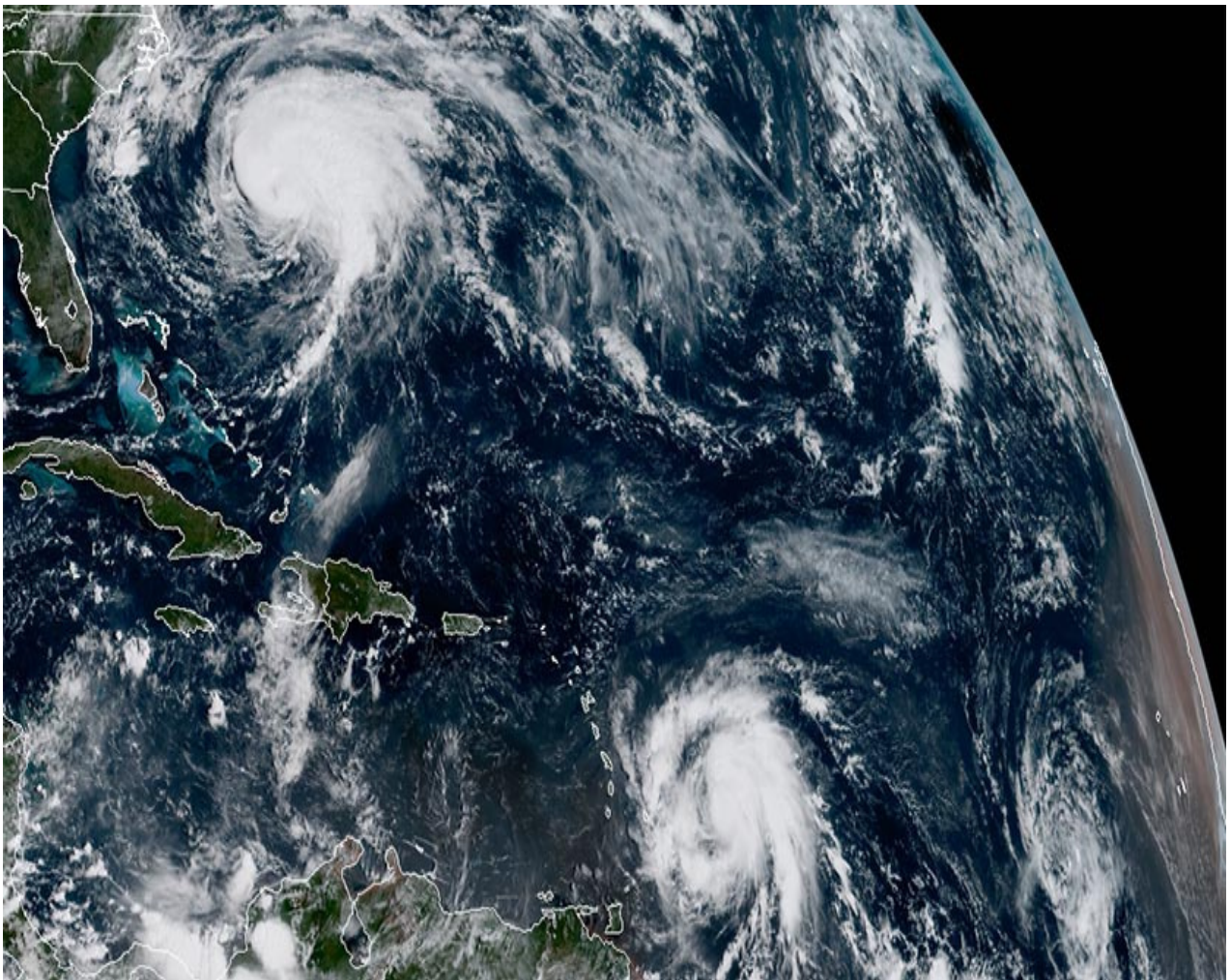


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Hurricane Maria Is Now A Category 3 Storm Packing 120 Mile-Per-Hour Winds; Hurricane Warning Issued For U.S. Virgin Islands

Weather Updates / **Published On September 18, 2017 05:07 PM /**

Staff **September 18, 2017**



Hurricane Maria continues to grow in strength, with the latest National Hurricane Center (N.H.C.) advisory revealing that the storm, as of 11:00 a.m., had grown into a category 3 hurricane packing winds of 120 miles per hour, with higher gusts. Maria is also projected to bring up to 20 inches of rain in some areas of the territory, and a more sustained 6-12 inches throughout the islands.

The N.H.C. has issued a hurricane warning for the U.S. Virgin Islands. Governor Kenneth Mapp has called a press conference for 2:00 p.m. today.

According to the National Hurricane Center, as of 11:00 a.m., the center of Hurricane Maria was located near latitude 14.7 North, longitude 60.1 West. Maria is moving toward the west-northwest near 10 mph (17 km/h), and this motion with some 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, over the extreme northeastern Caribbean Sea Tuesday and Tuesday night, and approach Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands on Wednesday.

Reports from an Air Force Reserve Hurricane Hunter aircraft indicate that maximum sustained winds have increased to near 120 mph (195 km/h) with higher gusts. Maria is a category 3 hurricane on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale. Additional rapid strengthening is forecast during the next 48 hours, and Maria is expected to be a dangerous major hurricane as it moves through the Leeward Islands and the northeastern Caribbean Sea.

Hurricane-force winds extend outward up to 15 miles (30 km) from the center and tropical-storm-force winds extend outward up to 125 miles (205 km). The minimum central pressure estimated from the Hurricane Hunter aircraft data is 959 mb (28.32 inches).

Along with the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guadeloupe, Dominica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Montserrat, Martinique, St. Lucia, British Virgin Islands, were placed on hurricane warning.

Storm Surge

A dangerous storm surge accompanied by large and destructive waves will raise water levels by as much as 6 to 9 feet above normal tide levels in the hurricane warning area near where the center of Maria moves across the Leeward Islands and the British Virgin Islands.

The combination of a dangerous storm surge and the tide will cause normally dry areas near the coast to be flooded by rising waters moving inland from the shoreline. The water is expected to reach the following heights above ground if the peak surge occurs at the time of high tide...

Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands...6 to 9 ft

The deepest water will occur along the immediate coast near and to the north and east of the landfall location, where the surge will be accompanied by large and destructive waves. Surge-related flooding depends on the relative timing of the surge and the tidal cycle, and can vary greatly over short distances.

Rainfall

Maria is expected to produce total rain accumulations of 6 to 12 inches with isolated maximum amounts of 20 inches across the central and southern Leeward Islands, and the U.S. and British Virgin Islands through Wednesday night. Rainfall amounts of 6 to 12 inches with isolated maximum amounts of 25 inches are expected across Puerto Rico. Maria is also expected to produce total rain accumulations of 2 to 4 inches with isolated maximum amounts of 8 inches over the remaining northern Leeward Islands from

Barbuda to Anguilla, eastern portions of the Dominican Republic, as well as the Windward Islands and Barbados. Rainfall on all of these islands 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.

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