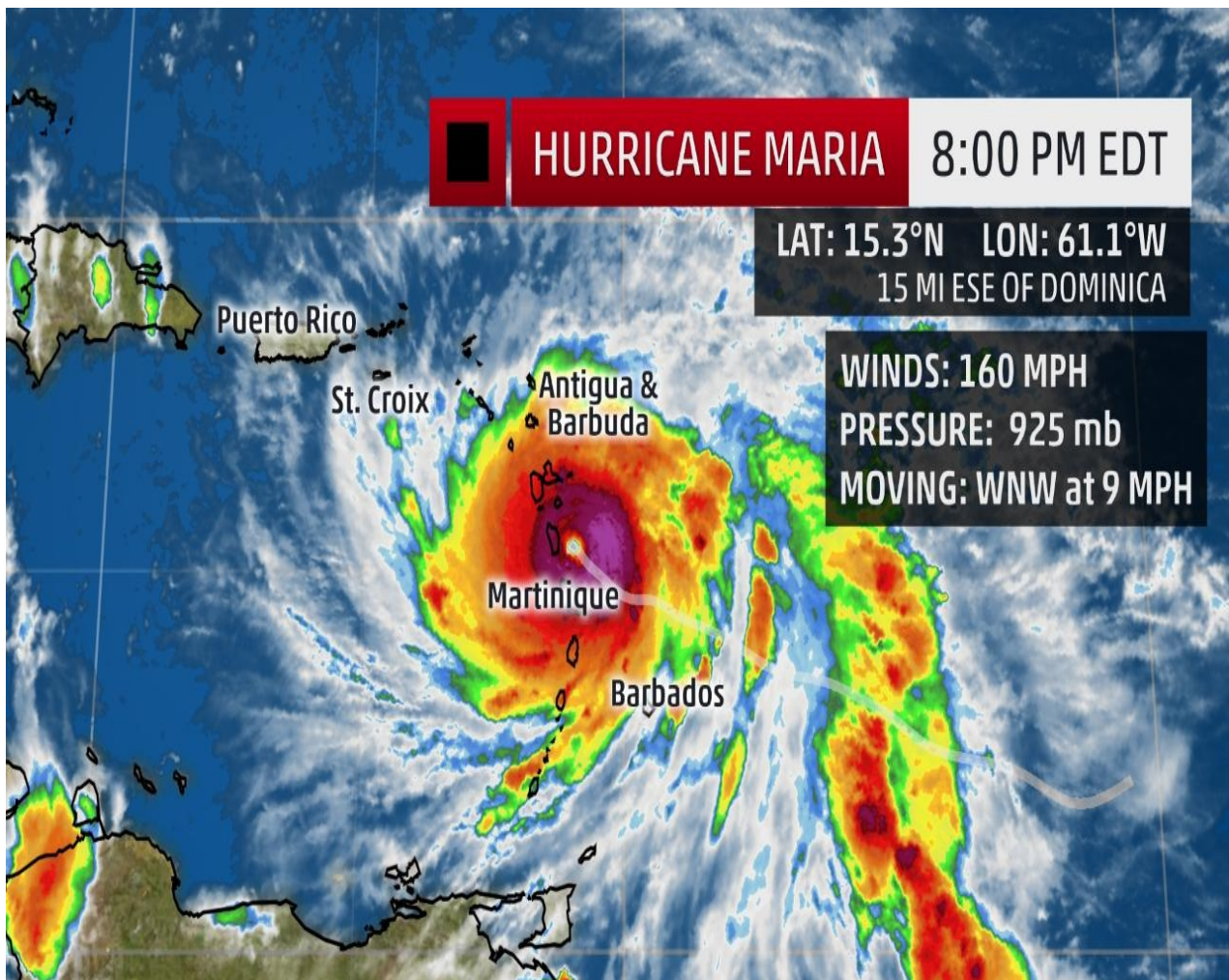


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Hurricane Maria Is Now A Cat 5 Storm; St. Croix To Sustain Direct Impact

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Hurricane Maria has quickly moved from a category 4 to a powerful and potentially catastrophic category 5 storm, according to the National Hurricane Center's 8:00 p.m. advisory, and was on path to directly impact Dominica Monday night.

The powerful storm is barreling towards the USVI less than one week after Hurricane Irma left ruinous damage in the St. Thomas-St. John District, and multiple other islands.

Earlier in the day, at about 2:00 p.m., Governor Kenneth Mapp somewhat cautiously announced that Maria would pass to the south of St. Croix some 22 miles away. But at 6:00 p.m. Monday, after being briefed by the National Weather Service, the governor

relayed grim news to Virgin Islanders, especially those living on St. Croix.

"Let me start out by saying I do not have good news," Mr. Mapp began.

Maria now has maximum sustained winds of 160 miles per hour with higher gusts, and is expected to become more powerful. The governor was told by the National Weather Service that St. Croix was less than 10 miles away from the storm's center, a projection that places the island directly in Maria's path. "In effect, it will be a direct hit," the governor said.

Maria, the governor went on -- reading carefully from notes provided by the National Weather Service -- would bring torrential rainfall of up to 12-18 inches to St. Croix and 8-12 inches to St. Thomas. And when Maria eventually moves away from the territory, rainfall would continue for about a week, he said.

Tropical storm-force winds on St. Thomas and St. John are expected to last from 6:00 p.m. Tuesday through 10:00 p.m. Wednesday. On St. Croix, tropical storm-force winds are expected from 2:00 p.m. Tuesday through 7:00 p.m. Wednesday, with hurricane-force winds being felt on St. Croix from midnight Tuesday through 8:00 a.m. Wednesday.

While the territory will start feeling the effects of the storm from 2:00 p.m., outer band winds and rain will start before that time, the governor said. He also revealed that by 2:00 p.m. Tuesday the Water and Power Authority will turn off power on St. Croix in preparation for the storm.

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

A hurricane warning is now in effect for the U.S. Virgin Islands, British Virgin Islands, Culebra, Vieques, Puerto Rico, Dominica, Guadeloupe, and St. Kitts and Nevis.

A tropical storm warning is in effect for Antigua and Barbuda, Anguilla, St. Martin (Dutch and French), Saba and St. Eustatius, St. Lucia and Martinique.

According to N.H.C.'s 8:00 p.m. advisory, the eye of Hurricane Maria was located near latitude 15.3 North, longitude 61.1 West. Maria is moving toward the west-northwest near 9 mph (15 km/h), and this general motion is expected to continue through Wednesday. On the forecast track, the core of Maria will move near Dominica and the adjacent Leeward Islands during the next few hours, over the extreme northeastern Caribbean Sea the remainder of tonight and Tuesday, and approach Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands Tuesday night and Wednesday.

Maximum sustained winds are near 160 mph (260 km/h) with higher gusts. Maria is a category 5 hurricane on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale. Some additional strengthening is possible tonight, but some fluctuations in intensity are likely during the next day or two.

Hurricane-force winds extend outward up to 25 miles (35 km) from the center and tropical-storm-force winds extend outward up to 125 miles (205 km). The estimated minimum central pressure based on Air Force Hurricane Hunter data is 925 mb (27.32 inches).