

The Virgin Islands Consortium

EPA Assessing Drinking Water And Wastewater Treatment Facilities In USVI Following Hurricanes Irma And Maria

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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on Monday said it continues to coordinate closely with federal, commonwealth, territory, and local partners as the Agency responds to the impact of Hurricane Maria. EPA is supporting the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) through its assistance to the governments of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI). The federal agency said it is focused on environmental impacts and potential threats to human health caused by Hurricane Maria, as well as the safety of those in the affected areas.

About 100 personnel are currently involved in hurricane response efforts.

EPA's six-person water assessment team arrived in St. Croix on September 24, and have begun coordinating with the USVI Department of Planning and Natural Resources to assess drinking water and wastewater treatment facilities. The EPA team has the ability to perform basic testing of drinking water. EPA's Region 2 Emergency Operations Center was able to get some generators shipped on September 23 to the USVI to help get the USVI labs back on line to perform water testing.

Four portable reverse osmosis drinking water treatment units from the Department of Defense have arrived in the USVI and could be used to provide drinking water as needed. The USVI Water and Power Authority is working to get all drinking water systems energized, and as that process proceeds, they will coordinate closely with EPA and FEMA to use the four treatment units as needed.

Assessment teams made up of On-Scene Coordinators (OSCs), Remedial Project Managers (RPMs), technical assistance contractors, and public information officers continue to deploy to Puerto Rico. Preparations are underway to re-assess Superfund and oil sites in Puerto Rico and the USVI as part of the EPA re-deployment plan.

Downed power lines in St. Croix, USVI. Courtesy of the U.S. EPA.

Enforcement Actions

No Action Assurance (NAA) - EPA policy allows the agency to issue NAAs in cases where it is necessary to avoid extreme risks to public health and safety and where no other mechanism can adequately address the matters. The agency issued the following NAA related to Hurricane Maria:

- On September 22, EPA announced that it will exercise enforcement discretion for mobile power generators being imported into the United States that will be used as emergency sources of power in Puerto Rico as a result of Hurricane Maria. Under this NAA, EPA will not pursue enforcement actions for certain violations of the Clean Air Act for mobile power generators being imported for use in Puerto Rico that have not been certified to meet U.S. pollution control standards.

Safe Drinking Water Act Order – On September 23, EPA issued an order to FEMA and the Department of Defense (DOD) that provides direction on supplying of clean drinking water in the U.S. Virgin Islands and authorizes FEMA and DOD to install and operate temporary water treatment units that will provide a supply of clean drinking water.

EPA has important resources available online in English and Spanish about floodwaters, hazardous debris, household hazardous waste, and other hurricane impacts. EPA will continue to provide regular updates about EPA's response to Hurricane Maria. For information and updates, visit: www.epa.gov/hurricane-maria.