

The Virgin Islands Consortium

USVI Receives Over \$6 Million In Grants From EPA Following Hurricanes Irma And Maria

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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has so far granted the U.S. Virgin Islands \$6.3 million in grants following the passage of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, the agency made known in its Friday release on its initiatives in the territory and Puerto Rico. The grants will be used to implement and support specific projects and programs as well as develop environmental plans in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

The EPA said that 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 territory.

The EPA 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 132 personnel are currently involved in hurricane response efforts.

Assessment teams made up of on-scene coordinators, remedial project managers, technical assistance contractors, and public information officers continue to deploy to Puerto Rico and the USVI. This includes eighteen more EPA responders who deployed to the USVI September 28.

"We have begun re-assessing superfund sites, oil sites, and chemical facilities in Puerto Rico and the USVI as part of EPA's response to Hurricane Maria. A team of EPA employees are co-located with FEMA in its coordination centers in both San Juan and St. Croix, USVI, to facilitate efficient interaction with local governments and other federal agencies," the agency said.

EPA is continuing to coordinate with local governments in Puerto Rico and the USVI to assess the conditions of water and wastewater treatment plants. It is also working to get labs back on line so that environmental samples can be locally analyzed. In Puerto Rico, assessment teams evaluated three government-owned laboratories where water and wastewater samples are tested; the labs in Arecibo and Cayugas were found to have significant damage, while the lab in Mayaguez is operational.

In St. Croix two EPA water assessment and sampling teams, joined by representatives of the USVI government, have sampled 38 public drinking water systems as of Friday. For the systems where a problem has been detected, steps have been taken to disinfect the water system. Sample results are being provided to the USVI government and other system owners/operators to inform and assist them in getting their drinking water systems back up and running.