

The Virgin Islands Consortium

U.S. Virgin Islanders Displaced From HUD Housing May Be Eligible For FEMA Help

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ST. CROIX -- U.S. Virgin Islanders who were directly impacted by hurricanes Irma or Maria and were receiving rental assistance from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) before the storms should register with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

According to a FEMA release, St. Croix, St. John and St. Thomas (including Water Island) have all been designated for FEMA Individual Assistance as a result of major disaster declarations for hurricanes Irma and Maria in the Virgin Islands.

Affected residents can apply for FEMA help if they were displaced from their HUD-assisted housing because of the hurricanes. This includes those who were:

- Living in HUD-assisted public housing, or
- Living in a privately owned apartment that provides rental assistance from HUD, or
- Living in a private home or apartment using a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher from a housing authority.

Survivors may be eligible for temporary assistance to pay for a place to live, or for grants to replace essential contents such as clothing and essential household items, as well as medical, dental and burial expenses.

Those who have HUD rental assistance may receive FEMA help to pay for a place to live until they relocate to public housing, relocate to private housing that provides HUD assistance, or they sign a lease with a private property owner using a Section 8 voucher.

Federal law prevents FEMA from duplicating benefits provided by another agency. When a HUD-assisted resident's home becomes unlivable, HUD stops paying rental assistance for that residence. The survivor may then apply for FEMA Individual Assistance. There is no duplication of benefits because HUD is not paying rental assistance.

When the survivor moves back into a HUD-assisted residence, or signs a new lease for rental housing under the Section 8 program, HUD assistance resumes. At that point, the survivor may no longer receive FEMA assistance.

Virgin Islanders who have not yet registered with FEMA can do so online at www.DisasterAssistance.gov, in Spanish at www.DisasterAssistance.gov/es, or by phone at **800-621-3362** or (TTY) **800-462-7585**. Those who use 711-Relay or Video Relay Services may call 800-621-3362.

The toll-free telephone numbers operate from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. (local time) seven days a week until further notice. Operators are standing by to assist survivors in English, Spanish and many other languages.

Feature Image: Section of Tutu High Rise Housing Community in St. Thomas ravaged by Hurricane Irma. (Ernice Gilbert, VIC)