

The Virgin Islands Consortium

FEMA Housing Inspectors On Ground In U.S. Virgin Islands Neighborhoods

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Ernice Gilbert **October 07, 2017**



Housing inspectors from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) are visiting neighborhoods in the Virgin Islands to verify damages caused by hurricanes Irma and Maria, the federal agency announced Friday.

Inspectors will contact survivors who have registered with FEMA. They will first call survivors in advance of the visit to set up an appointment. If they are unable to reach a survivor by phone due to the current communications outages, they may visit a residence without a confirmed appointment.

The Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency has asked that survivors place visible plot numbers on their property to ensure inspectors can identify the property.

“A housing inspection is an important early step in the recovery process, as it helps us determine how FEMA and our recovery partners can best assist you,” said Federal Coordinating Officer William Vogel. “We urge residents to make themselves as readily available as they can to meet with their housing inspector.”

FEMA understands that some Virgin Islanders with property damage may have temporarily relocated off the islands. We are asking family and friends to let them know they should still register for assistance with FEMA and provide their current contact information. We will reach out to them to coordinate an inspection when it's possible.

Inspections can only be done after survivors register. Those with damage to homes, vehicles, personal property, business or its inventory should register with FEMA. When applying, survivors will be asked to provide their current contact information so that an inspector can reach them.

When inspectors arrive at a home, they will display their official contractor photo identification. If the photo ID is not visible, it is important to ask to see it. This helps prevent fraud. Please be aware that FEMA inspectors do not charge survivors for their services or recommend specific contractors. If someone asks for money to inspect your home or promotes a contractor, it is most likely part of a scam.

Inspectors already have each applicant's nine-digit registration number so there should be no need to ask for it. Survivors will however be asked to provide a valid driver's license or other photo identification.

To speed the FEMA assistance process:

- Ensure the house or plot number is clearly visible from the road.
- Keep your appointment or notify the inspector if you need to reschedule.
- Be reachable. It helps to inform neighbors where you can be reached if your home is uninhabitable.
- Survivors who are displaced to other areas or islands may designate a relative, friend or neighbor to allow the inspector onto the property. But the designated person must be 18 years or older.
- Provide proof of ownership, such as a tax bill, deed, mortgage payment receipt or insurance policy with the property's address. Renters must show proof of occupancy, such as a lease, rent payment receipt or utility bill.
 - FEMA will only provide assistance for a primary residence. However, survivors may be eligible for a low-interest disaster loan.
- If possible, provide photos of the damage that can supplement the images taken by the inspector.

An inspection generally takes about 15-30 minutes to complete. Keep in mind that inspectors do not determine an applicant's eligibility for assistance. They just enter

the information electronically into FEMA computers. Their job is to verify disaster damage, but they do not need to document **all** damage. They review damage to structures, major appliances, septic systems and wells.

No need to wait, begin cleaning up now. Survivors should begin cleaning up without worrying about losing out on disaster assistance.

“We understand that residents want to get their hurricane-damaged homes cleaned up as soon as possible,” said Vogel. “You don’t need to wait for us to get start cleaning up. Just be sure to document the damage.”

For those with Communication Needs. Disaster survivors with communication-related disabilities — those who are deaf or hard of hearing, blind or have vision loss and those with speech difficulties — may request accommodations to aid in communication. For instance, survivors may request an American Sign Language interpreter when registering. (They should also verify the accommodation with the inspector when contacted.)

Registration with FEMA can be completed 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.

- *Disaster recovery assistance is available without regard to race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, disability, English proficiency or economic status. If you or someone you know has been discriminated against, call FEMA toll-free at **800-621-3362** (voice, **711/VRS** - Video Relay Service) (TTY: **800-462-7585**). Multilingual operators are available (press 2 for Spanish).*
- *FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.*

For official information on the recovery effort following the hurricanes, please visit www.informusvi.com or www.usviupdate.com. Follow us on twitter at twitter.com/femaregion2.

*To donate or volunteer, contact the voluntary or charitable organization of your choice through the National Voluntary Agencies Active in Disasters (NVOAD) at www.nvoad.org. For those who wish to help, **cash** donations offer voluntary agencies the most flexibility in obtaining the most-needed resources and pumps money into the local economy to help businesses recover. The Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands also has the “Fund for the Virgin Islands” at www.USVIrecovery.org.*

Feature Image: Destroyed home and vehicle on Bordeaux Mountain, St. John. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

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