

The Virgin Islands Consortium

On Ground In St. Croix, Army Corps Of Engineers Division General Assesses Response

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ST. CROIX -- Erecting more resilient utility poles, putting less weight on them and assessing the cost of placing an entire power grid underground were some of the advice that Brigadier General Diana Holland, Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) commander of the south Atlantic region, offered during an interview with The Consortium during her third stop to the territory on Tuesday. The general, who oversees operations in the U.S. Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and Florida, has been crisscrossing the areas affected by Hurricanes Irma and Maria to support the efforts of USACE, while assessing the performance of its members.

General Holland, who only became division commander in July, told The Consortium that she did not expect to be faced with so many natural disasters at once 60 days into her new role, but deemed the experience a "meaningful" one, and expressed a great sense of responsibility in assuring that USACE's response to the disasters in all affected areas went beyond the call of duty.

According to the general, the four traditional priorities of USACE, whose directions during storms are given by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), include debris removal, infrastructure assessment, providing temporary power, and the [Blue Roof](#) program. "There are other things, but those are the traditional priorities and the three places," she said.



Brigadier General Diana Holland, Army Corps of

Engineers Commander of the South Atlantic Region

When asked about the prudence in placing the territory's utility poles underground and whether that was a recommendation she would give, General Holland said while placing power lines underground certainly has its advantages, such projects are very expensive, and cost benefit analysis should be performed when contemplating these major infrastructure improvements.

General Holland also spoke of ways that utility poles could be reinforced. She said stronger poles should be considered, as well as placing less weight on them. "Sometimes there's too much weight on the poles so they buckle. Sometimes it's not because the winds are too strong, but in addition to power lines, you have telephone lines that put more stress on the poles, so there's a number of other things that we can do," she said.

Asked about the response of USACE members in the USVI so far, the general said, "They are attacking this mission; they are very enthusiastic. If you were to ask them how do they feel about the mission, they would say, 'I can't imagine being anywhere else right now.'"

And her experience in the territory has been pleasant. She lauded locals for their warmth and welcoming nature, so much so that she may move here one day. "The Virgin Islands has been very welcoming and gracious and very friendly people, and it's a great place to work. I might just move here some day permanently," she said.

Following the interview, which was conducted during a bus ride to FEMA's staging base at the Limetree Bay Terminals east parking lot, General Holland awarded medals to team members who had shown exceptional leadership in their various fields.

"I want to thank you again for all you're doing. I recognize that many of you have a day job somewhere else, and there's a district out there that's doing without you and people are picking up some of your duties. You're not with your families, you're not at home in your own beds, so I really appreciate what you're doing," she said.

Feature Image: General Diana Holland, left, takes a picture with medal awardees and soldiers during a brief ceremony on Tuesday at the Limetree Bay Terminals east parking lot. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

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