

The Virgin Islands Consortium

While Some VI Residents Suffer And DSNAP Rollout Delayed, MREs Are Sitting In Limetree Bay Parking Lot

Disaster Recovery / **Published On October 26, 2017 10:04 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **October 26, 2017**



ST. CROIX -- There are many new costs associated with living following the passage of one ferocious hurricane. In the territory's case, the biggest issue has been the lack of power. Many people don't have generators or the money to buy one, so they have to purchase meats -- if they can -- daily to cook, or survive on canned goods and rice. They also have to buy ice almost daily, all of which cost money; money many USVI residents simply don't have. And if you do have a generator or you're able to get one, that costs of maintenance and buying gas on a daily basis are astronomical.

The U.S. Virgin Islands was not hit by not one ferocious storm, but two. Both of which were Category 5 monsters whose winds felled trees, ripped off roofs and caused all sorts

of untold damages. [Lives were lost as well.](#)

During one of his many press briefings following the storms and [before Oct. 14](#), Governor Kenneth Mapp announced that his administration would stop distributing meals ready to eat (MREs), because residents would have soon received their Disaster Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (DSNAP) checks, which he said most Virgin Islands households would qualify for, since approval was based on the loss of power, which would have caused refrigerated items to spoil. He also said he wanted to save some MREs because the hurricane season was still active.

Back then, Mr. Mapp said the DSNAP would be released on Oct. 16. But as the date drew closer (on Oct. 14 to be exact), the governor said his administration would delay the rollout of DSNAP checks because Virgin Islanders, even if they didn't have electricity, would buy frozen meats and leave them in refrigerators without power. In essence, the governor said Virgin Islands residents did not have enough discernment to know that buying items with their DSNAP funds that needed to be refrigerated without having a powered refrigerator to store them in, would cause those items to spoil.

When pressed on the issue, Mr. Mapp shouted down a Consortium reporter, and said that the DSNAP would rollout on November 2. The governor's response was so disrespectful and his conduct so unbefitting of the governorship, that The Consortium's Editorial Board [responded](#).

One week later, Mr. Mapp [changed his reason](#) for delaying the issuance of DSNAP, as it became more apparent that his Nov. 2 issuance date would not be met. During his Monday press briefing, Mr. Mapp said that the program needed authorization from the Food and Nutrition Service, a division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Dept. of Human Services Commissioner Felicia Blyden attempted to explain setbacks the department had suffered that contributed to the delay.

Yet even as there's no clear date for the DSNAP rollout, there are pallets of MREs and other relief supplies sitting in the Limetree Bay Terminals east parking lot, as the governor has decided that it's best to not distribute the remaining MREs, with no good reasons as to why.

[View the original embedded media](#)

Relative to Mr. Mapp's explanation that the hurricane season will be effect until November 30, therefore he needed to save some MREs just in case, that answer stands contrary to how the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) operates. William Vogel, federal coordinating officer of FEMA Region II, told The Consortium on Tuesday that if the territory runs out of MREs and another storm were to make landfall, FEMA would simply request more as they're needed.

Another reason Mr. Mapp gave for halting the distribution of MREs, was that supermarkets were reopening, which would allow residents to go shopping -- as the territory, he said, headed back to normalcy. But many Virgin Islanders are without jobs, and while some may apply for regular SNAP, which takes a process, many need the food items now, according to residents The Consortium spoke with.

The need for additional relief supplies over a month following the storm still remains great, as proven by relief drives held [by Tim Duncan](#), the NBA legend and Virgin Islander, and [Denise Cromwell Brown](#), a Virgin Islander living in Texas, who distributed over 40,000 pounds of goods on Saturday. Mrs. Brown's event, which was scheduled to end at 3:00 p.m., ended by 1:00 p.m., as all the items were depleted soon after the 11:00 a.m. start -- with countless more residents receiving only water. The Tim Duncan events saw an overflow of residents as well.

[View the original embedded media](#)

And while not all who collected items at the private relief functions were in desperate need of them, most of the people who came out genuinely needed the help.

One woman, a teacher, whose roof was destroyed during the passage of Hurricane Maria, sat in her SUV with her mother on Saturday, disappointed that she was not able to get at least one bag of supplies, as they were already depleted by the time she arrived. She was not only responsible for feeding herself and her mother, but she's been cooking for many in her neighborhood as well. She complained that some residents had taken more items than they were supposed to, an observation that was corroborated by Mrs. Brown.

"But," the teacher concluded, "God is in control."

Feature Image: MREs and other relief supplies at Limetree Bay Terminals east parking lot. (Ernice Gilbert, VIC)