

The Virgin Islands Consortium

448 Vessels Were Impacted By Hurricanes Irma And Maria In USVI, EPA Says

Environment / **Published On November 21, 2017 11:24 AM /**

Staff **November 21, 2017**



The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on Monday revealed that 448 vessels were identified as being impacted by Hurricanes Irma and Maria in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The count, higher than that of Puerto Rico, which on Monday stood at 340, brings to the fore the vast damage the USVI's marine industry sustained during the passage of the ruinous storms.

The EPA continues to play a major role in mitigating the impact that damaged vessels, including sunken ones, have on the environment. "Our role is to assist both Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands to minimize environmental damage from boats leaking gasoline, fuel or other contaminants," said EPA Regional Administrator Pete Lopez. "We

are doing this in a way that respects the vessel owner's rights while still protecting people from spills and hazardous substances that might be onboard the vessels.”

Marine Vessels Recovery Operations

The EPA is also supporting P.R., the USVI and the U.S. Coast Guard in marine vessel recovery work. Its teams continue to locate, assess and retrieve sunken, damaged and derelict vessels around Puerto Rico and the USVI, the federal agency said, adding that it continues to assist with the recycling and disposal of recovered oil and hazardous materials from the vessels.

EPA's support role includes recording the vessel's location and collecting information such as the name of the vessel and identification number, condition, impact to surrounding areas and/or sensitive/protected habitats (e.g. mangroves, coral reefs) for future recovery missions and owner notifications. A higher priority is placed on vessels found to be actively leaking fuel or hazardous materials, where containment and absorbent booms are placed to decrease contamination, the EPA said.

Once the damaged vessels are brought to shore, or are processed on a staging barge, EPA will be handling various hazardous materials for recycling and disposal, including petroleum products (oil, gas or diesel fuel), batteries, and e-waste, which can harm the environment if they're not removed from the waters. EPA will also recycle or dispose of any “household hazardous wastes”, such as cleaners, paints or solvents and appliances from the vessels. It is important to properly dispose of these items to prevent contamination to the aquatic ecosystem.

Assessment teams are tagging vessels with a sticker requesting that owners contact the U.S. Coast Guard to either report their vessel's removal, or to request U.S. Coast Guard assistance in its removal. There is no cost, penalty or fine associated with the removal of the vessels.

Correction: Nov. 22, 2017

The Consortium was contacted by Chief Petty Officer David Mosley, public information officer for the U.S. Coast Guard's ongoing hurricane response in the U.S. Virgin Islands relative to misplaced vessels, who told the publication that information provided by the E.P.A. regarding the amount of damaged vessels found in USVI waters, is wrong. While the E.P.A. said 589 vessels damaged vessels were found, Mr. Mosley said the actual number is much smaller: 448. The Consortium has updated the article to reflect the correct information.

Feature Image: Damage vessels in the USVI. (EPA)