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# Tropical Storm Expected to Impact USVI Tonight; No Sandbags or Shelters Because Covid-19 Preparations Have Not Been Made

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The National Hurricane Center in its 5:00 a.m. forecast said the U.S. Virgin Islands will face tropical-storm force winds beginning tonight as Tropical Cyclone Nine makes its way across the Leeward Islands.

A tropical storm warning is in effect for the following islands: the U.S. Virgin Islands, the British Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Barbados, Dominica, St. Maartin, Antigua, Barbuda, Montserrat, St. Kitts, Nevis, Guadeloupe, Martinique, St. Barthelemy, and the north coast of Haiti from Le Mole St. Nicholas eastward to the northern border with the Dominican Republic.

The government of the Bahamas has issued a Tropical Storm Watch for the southeastern Bahamas, including the Acklins, Crooked Island, Long Cay, the Inaguas, Mayaguana, and the Ragged Islands.

A Tropical Storm Warning means that tropical storm conditions are expected somewhere within the warning area within 36 hours.

A Tropical Storm Watch means that tropical storm conditions are possible within the watch area, generally within 48 hours.

According to N.H.C., at 5:00 a.m. today the disturbance was centered near latitude 15.3 North, longitude 61.3 West. The system is moving toward the west-northwest near 23 mph (37 km/h), and this general motion with some slight reduction in forward speed is expected over the next few days. On the forecast track, the center will move through the southern Leeward Islands during the next few hours, near or over the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico tonight, near or over Hispaniola on Thursday, and near or over the southeastern Bahamas on Friday.

Maximum sustained winds remain near 45 mph (75 km/h) with higher gusts. Some increase in strength is forecast today, with weakening likely on Thursday due to land interaction, and some restrengthening possible late week.

Environmental conditions are expected to be conducive for additional development, and a tropical storm is forecast to form later today.

Tropical-storm-force winds extend outward up to 275 miles (445 km) from the center. Antigua recently reported a wind gust of 47 mph (76 km/h). The estimated minimum central pressure based on Air Force Reserve reconnaissance data and surface observations is 1005 mb (29.68 inches).

### **No Sandbags or Shelters**

During a press briefing held Monday afternoon, VITEMA Director Daryl Jaschen said sandbags would not be issued because Covid-19 protocols were not in place, and that it was too late to make accommodations.

“Sand and sand bags will not be issued for this storm so as not to have gatherings of individuals,” he said. “There is not time to prepare adequate mitigation measures for this storm.”

According to a Government House release issued Tuesday night, Human Services Commissioner Causey-Gomez also cited the COVID-19 pandemic as the reason for her decision not to open shelters for this weather event.

“While this could pose a problem for certain residents with existing roof and flooding problems, in order to limit the spread of Coronavirus and promote health and safety for our islands, the Government of the Virgin Islands will not open congregate shelters at this time,” she said.

Even so, Governor Albert Bryan urged the community to be prepared. “I know that this is an incredibly stressful time for our residents, as we are also trying to protect ourselves against the spread of the coronavirus, but we must not let our guard down on this front,” he said. “We have seen what can happen, and we also know what we can do when we prepare and when we come together.”

Mr. Bryan has submitted a request for a federal disaster declaration in advance of the approaching storm system, Government House said.

“While we are hoping for the best, we are preparing for the worst,” he said. “We have seen in the past how unpredictable these weather systems are and know better than to trust the safety of our community to the whims of these storms.”

### **Hazards affecting land**

**Wind:** Tropical storm conditions are moving across portions of the Leeward Islands now and will spread across the U.S. and British Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico this afternoon through Thursday morning. These conditions are forecast to reach portions of the Dominican Republic and Haiti within the warning area early Thursday. Tropical storm conditions are possible in the watch areas on Thursday.

**Rainfall:** The potential tropical cyclone is expected to produce the following rain accumulations:

Across the northern Leeward Islands, British and U.S. Virgin Islands: 3 to 6 inches.

Across Puerto Rico: 3 to 6 inches, with isolated maximum totals of 10 inches.

Across the Dominican Republic, northern Haiti and the Turks and Caicos: 3 to 6 inches, with isolated maximum totals of 8 inches.

Across the Inagua Islands: 4 to 8 inches, with isolated totals of 12 inches.

These rainfall amounts could lead to life threatening flash flooding and mudslides, as well as potential riverine flooding.

**Surf:** Swells generated by Potential Tropical Cyclone Nine will be affecting portions of the Leeward Islands, the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico during the next day or two. These dangerous conditions are forecast to reach the north coast of the Dominican Republic and the Turks and Caicos Islands and the southeastern Bahamas on Thursday. These swells are likely to cause life-threatening surf and rip current conditions. Please consult products from your local weather office.