

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Announces \$766 Million Program To Help Homeowners Who Did Not Qualify For FEMA Assistance

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ST. CROIX -- Governor Kenneth Mapp announced on Wednesday a \$766 million program aimed at helping homeowners whose homes were affected by either Hurricanes Irma or Maria, or both, but did not qualify for home repair assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The announcement was made during Mr. Mapp's first hurricane-related press briefing since his last in December. Held at Government House, the governor said he would host the press briefings every week moving forward, "because they provide a level of actual

information."

The program is called the Emergency Home Repairs V.I. Project, and is being spearheaded by the local government through the V.I. Housing Finance Authority (V.I.H.F.A.), according to the governor. Beginning on Monday, V.I.H.F.A. will open call centers and provide call numbers where residents will be able to apply for funding for immediate repairs to their homes.

"That program is expected to put an average of \$25,000 in over 12,000 homes in the Virgin Islands for immediate repairs," the governor said. The requirements for qualification include:

1. Your home has to be your primary residence
2. You'll need to be registered with FEMA and have a FEMA registration number.
3. Your home must have some kind of damage.

The governor said there are 15 items that make homeowners eligible to receive repairs under the program, and there is no requirement to provide a demonstration of insurance. Some of the conditions include:

1. Work to provide essential power supply (damaged weatherhead, for example)
2. Work necessary to provide propane gas supply
3. Work to provide potable waterline supply (damaged plumbing)
4. Repairs to cistern (including cleaning of cistern for contamination)
5. Work necessary to repair and replace damaged windows or wall-mounted air conditioning units, ceiling fans or doors
6. Weatherproofing to include roof, walls and windows
7. Securing or replacing broken windows, and the repairing and replacement of non-functioning exterior and interior doors
8. Removal of disaster-related debris to safely enter, inspect and to perform eligible emergency work, and safety shelter in place

"Anything related to the disaster that affects your home, you can apply for this program," Mr. Mapp said. He said [Aecom](#), one of the firms that won the bid for the project, along with V.I.H.F.A., will begin on Monday contacting around 1,000 homeowners who sustained roof damage but were deemed ineligible for the blue roof program. "We are going to reach out to you because we see you as the priority simply because you were not being adequately sheltered, and your home could not be adequately covered," Mr. Mapp said. Once contacted, these homeowners will visit a designated center to fill out documents. An inspector will then be assigned to determine what the level of repairs are -- which the governor said will average about \$25,000 -- before providing the funding.

"This program is expected to employ some 2,500 folks," the governor said. "Because of the timeline that this program is expected to run, they're expecting up to 10,000 people could work in this program." Mr. Mapp, taking into account the level of construction work currently ongoing in the territory, said he expected there to be a shortage of employees to meet the demand. "And so the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority in conjunction with the Virgin Islands Department of Labor, will host job fairs," he said. There will be other job opportunities stemming from this project as well; not just construction work, Mr. Mapp said.

About 9 contractors have already been retained as subcontractors under the main contract of the project, the governor made known, adding that more licensed contractors and tradespeople will be hired. "We will be doing that across the media and letting folks know what they need to do and where they need to show up," he said.

The governor also reached out to landlords living in, say, a duplex that was damaged during the storms, asking that they register, "and we will figure out if we can bring you into the program, and if we can persuade FEMA that that's essential to sheltering," he said. The governor stressed that registration does not mean that the program has been approved for landlords or renters, "but we're working that through."

And the Emergency Home Repairs V.I. Project is separate from another federal program called the Permanent Repairs Program, which provides funding of up to \$75,000 in direct repairs to a hurricane-damaged home, according to the governor. He said 428 homeowners were approved in some manner -- "whether they take the repairs, or the cash," Mr. Mapp said -- while a number of homeowners were found to be ineligible. Many homeowners who were not approved were those with home insurance policies whose settlement claims had not yet been approved. Because of this, they were turned down by FEMA, according to the governor. However, participants in the Permanent Home Repairs Program have up until one year to reapply -- giving enough time for those with insurance policies to settle their claims.

Feature Image: Aerial shot of homes with blue roofs in Frederiksted, St. Croix. (Ernice Gilbert, VIC)