

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Nonprofit Releases Comprehensive Report On Hurricane Impact; Government Report Still Pending

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ST. CROIX -- At the dawn of a new hurricane season, a nonprofit organization has released two reports assessing the impact of the last two major hurricanes on St. Croix – a step taken in lieu of comparable data from the government.

[One report](#) assesses residents' housing damage, health issues related to the disasters, employment impact, hurricane relief needs, and priorities for community recovery. [The other](#) is a data compilation that specifically deals with the hurricanes' impact on nonprofit organizations.

The findings were a consequence of [the St. Croix Foundation's](#) futile attempts to find data on highly impacted households who could most benefit from hurricane relief supplies, the report says.

“Our assumption was that someone, an organization or the government, would be conducting a door-to-door needs assessment to check on residents, and we simply needed to gain access to the data,” the report reads. “During a conversation with the American Red Cross approximately two weeks after the storm, we were informed that no such community-wide, door-to-door assessment was planned.”

SFC Executive Director Deanna James elaborated in a phone interview Friday. She made it clear that other government agencies had collected different types of assessments in the months following the storms, but at the time SFC needed information, they had access to none.

“At the time we started, there was no one else who was collecting the data that we were seeking two weeks after the storm,” she said.

According to Ms. James, SFC immediately began acting as conduit for funneling relief supplies and aid after the hurricanes but had to halt operations when important questions arose.

“How are people making decisions on what to send if we don’t have an understanding of what people need?” was one of those questions, according to Ms. James.

The SFC team collected data between October 14 and December 31 of last year – a time period that spans up to three months after Hurricane Maria hit the Virgin Islands. The majority of surveys for individual households were collected between November 4, 2017 and December 15, 2017, according to their report released this June.

They reportedly surveyed a total of 1,047 residents from more than 100 neighborhoods who’d gathered at targeted community events for hurricane survivors, such as free supply distributions. Though the survey’s sample size is small and underrepresents residents from certain geographic areas, particularly the east-end of the island, it’s “large enough to make assertive claims about trends in individual and household needs on St. Croix after Hurricane Maria,” the report claims.

Key Findings on Housing

According to the report 93 percent of those surveyed reported that their homes were damaged; 76 percent had roof damage. Many respondents – 72 percent – had no homeowner’s insurance, and most of those who did have it felt like the coverage wouldn’t be enough to cover the full cost of their damages. Only 27 percent thought their insurance coverage would be enough.

The report also indicates that seniors aged 65 and older were more likely to have homeowner’s insurance than the general population, but they were less likely to say that they could afford their deductible.

Key Findings on Health

Sixty-five percent of those surveyed said they had mold in their homes.

About one out of every seven respondents said they were living in a home with both children and someone with special medical needs. Of those who had a member with

special medical needs, 26 percent said they didn't have access to crucial medicine or medical equipment after the storm.

Key Findings on Employment

As a result of the storm, thirty-four percent of respondents said they either had reduced hours at work or had not yet returned to work at the time they completed the survey.

Key Findings on Hurricane Relief Needs

Drinking water was a top necessity, according to the report. Forty-five percent of respondents said they needed drinking water; 36 percent, food; 25 percent, a generator; 20 percent, household water for hygiene and cleaning purposes; 13 percent, medications; eight percent, a tarp; and six percent, medical equipment.

The return of electricity seemed to decrease the need for water and food, according to surveyors' observations. The report also indicates that when members of a household couldn't access important medicine or medical equipment, it seemed to increase the need for other relief items including water, food, and generators.

Key Findings on Resident Priorities for Community Recovery

Respondents said they would like to see both federal and private resources go toward the roads, schools and education, the electric grid and the hospitals during the territory's recovery effort.

When will the government release official findings?

The USVI Hurricane Recovery and Resiliency Task Force [has promised to release a similar report](#) with comprehensive findings on the impact of Hurricanes Irma and Maria later this month. The first draft is slated to be published online on July 20 to allow for community input before the document is finalized, Task Force CEO Dina Simon said in June. Copies of the final report are scheduled to be distributed on Aug. 27.

Feature Image: Fort Christiansvaern after Hurricane Maria. (Credit: St. Croix Foundation)