

The Virgin Islands Consortium

FEMA Was Unprepared For Hurricane Maria's Aftermath In Puerto Rico, Report Says

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The Federal Emergency Management Agency disaster plan vastly underestimated Hurricane Maria's impact on Puerto Rico, because it was based on a focused disaster such as a tsunami and not a Category 5 hurricane affecting an island of over 3 million people. FEMA also badly underestimated how much fresh water and food would be needed, and how difficult it would be to resupply the island once stock was depleted.

Exacerbating FEMA's lack of preparation for the commonwealth, the agency's Puerto Rico warehouse was almost empty, as its contents were rushed to the U.S. Virgin Islands to supply St. Thomas and St. John, which had been ravaged by Hurricane Irma two weeks prior to Maria's arrival.

That's according to a report FEMA issued on July 12 detailing its response to the 2017 disasters -- including the California fires -- called the After-Action Report.

The report says FEMA had thousands fewer workers than it needed, and many of those it had were not qualified to handle such disasters. And FEMA had to borrow many workers from other agencies to help it manage the tremendous demand for essential needs that arose as a direct result of Hurricane Maria.

The agency distributed 130 million meals, 35 million of which were delivered to Puerto Rico. But according to its own report, FEMA took longer than expected to secure supplies, and it lost track of much of the aid and who needed it.

The report also says that FEMA failed to take account of the logistical problems that its own disaster planning drills had shown it could face when managing a disaster in Puerto Rico.

"The 2017 hurricane season showed that all levels of government — and individual families — need to be much better prepared with their own supplies, particularly in remote or insular areas where commodities take longer to deliver," the agency administrator, Brock Long, wrote in a draft report obtained by The New York Times ahead of official release. "In Puerto Rico, little of the communications infrastructure survived Hurricane Maria, and as a result, it was extremely difficult for the local, territory, or federal agencies to know what was needed and where in the immediate aftermath of the storm."

See the full report [here](#).

Hurricane Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico on Sept. 20 as a Category 4 storm, laying waste to most of the island while knocking out all its electric power and most of its cellphone towers.