

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Hurricane Season Has Officially Started | Here's Everything You Need To Know

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The 2019 Atlantic Hurricane Season starts today, and the local federal governments have been sharing information of preparedness. Below, everything you need to know.

Season prediction

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has predicted a near-normal season, with a likely range of 9 to 15 named storms (winds of 39 mph or higher), of which 4 to 8 could become hurricanes (winds of 74 mph or higher), including 2 to 4 major hurricanes (category 3, 4 or 5; with winds of 111 mph or higher).

Shelters

In its ongoing preparatory efforts for the season, the Department of Human Services late Friday announced shelters territory-wide in case of a storm. They include the following:

- **St. Thomas** – Department of Human Services Head Start Center, Sugar Estate and Lockhart Elementary School, 41 Estate Thomas
- **St. Croix** – Department of Human Services Head Start Center, Mars Hill, Frederiksted and St. Croix Educational Complex, 5A&C VICorp (across from the University of the Virgin Islands)
- **St. John** – Calabash Boom Community Center
- **Water Island** – Water Island Fire Station.

D.H.S. said it is the lead agency under the Emergency Services Function (ESF) No. 6 involving Mass Care. The goal is to provide safe, temporary accommodation for a significant number of residents and visitors who are threatened by an impending storm, or are displaced or homeless after a disastrous event.

“Sheltering is a key component of Mass Care, and we have been very deliberate in our selections of qualified facilities,” said D.H.S. Commissioner Nominee Kimberly Causey-Gomez said. “To that end, the assurances paramount to the selection of these primary shelters are that they meet all the necessary standards for shelters during a disaster.”

D.H.S. said residents are advised to use shelters in closest proximity to their homes. The department said it will provide sheltering-related updates and provide notice to the public approximately 48 hours in advance regarding shelter openings territory-wide.

Advice from FEMA

Build a Kit. Consider the specific needs of your family, including the elderly and those with access and functional needs, to ensure you have supplies for the first 10 days following a disaster as they may have to shelter in place at home.

- Store one gallon of water, for drinking and sanitation, for each person per day.
- Include non-perishable foods for each person in the household paying particular attention to family members with special diets and allergies.
- Have hand sanitizer, antibiotic ointment, hygienic products, diapers and wipes available.
- Include a favorite toy, stuffed animal, books and activities for younger members of the family.
- Protect your important documents such as vital records, insurance policies, medical information, property and financial records.
- Make sure to have adequate food and water for your pet. Be sure your pet is wearing a collar with updated identification tags with the pet's name, owner's name, address and phone number.

Make a family communications plan. As roads may be impassable and cell phone service may be disrupted, identify alternate ways of staying in touch with loved ones.

- Choose an out of town friend or relative as a point of contact.
- Decide on a meeting place in case you cannot return home.

- Keep important documents and phone numbers with you at all times.
- Ensure children are included in preparedness conversations and make sure they have emergency contacts memorized or saved in a secure place.

Harden and Protect Your Property. Virgin Islanders should also take steps to protect their homes.

- Review home insurance policies to ensure proper coverage and take photos of property.
- Prepare to store anything from your property that could be picked up by hurricane winds and turned into a harmful object.
- Trim trees to remove dead limbs and secure rain gutters and downspouts.
- Make sure porches, decks or sheds are sound and firmly attached.
- Fasten down roofs with hurricane straps or clips and install strong bolts at the top and bottom of exterior doors. Buy or make storm shutters for windows.

VITEMA

“Despite current predictions, it only takes one storm making landfall to make it a bad year for our territory,” said Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) Director Nominee, Daryl Jaschen. “VITEMA is committed to establishing a culture of preparedness throughout the territory. To this end, residents are strongly encouraged to prepare now, rather than later, participate in the upcoming Disaster Preparedness Expos throughout the territory, and find creative ways to prepare your communities for disasters. Share best practices and tips with your family members and neighbors, and always stay informed using credible sources.”

As the Agency tasked with preparing the territory for the threats and risks from natural and man-made hazards, VITEMA has advised all Virgin Islands residents to begin hurricane preparedness today. The agency gave tips similar to what was provided by FEMA. They include:

Assemble A Disaster Supply Kit: Your disaster supply kit should be created based on the special needs of your household. Consider the dietary conditions of elderly family members and pets. Include non-perishable food and water for each person for at least ten days. Be sure to include a battery-powered radio, cellphone chargers, flashlights, extra batteries, cash, first aid supplies, medications, personal hygiene items, baby supplies and copies of your critical information if you need to evacuate. Critical documents such as birth certificates, social security cards, deeds, and home and flood insurance policies should be stored in a water-tight container.

Communicate: Make an Emergency Communication Plan and ensure all household members, including children and elderly household members are aware of the plan. Talk with your family about what to do if a hurricane strikes. Identify off-island contacts and plan to text, rather than call if a hurricane strikes. Practice your communication plan by going through steps you will take if there is an emergency.

Prepare Your Home: Review home and flood insurance policies to ensure you are properly insured; take photos of your property. Trim or remove damaged trees and limbs to keep you and your property safe. Secure loose rain gutters and downspouts and clear

any clogged areas or debris to prevent water damage to your property. Conduct roof inspections and repairs, ensure screws and straps are fastened tightly. Purchase or conduct maintenance on your portable generator. Always ensure fuel for your generator is stored in an ANSI-approved container in a cool, well-ventilated place.

Register for Emergency Alerts and Notifications: Stay informed about weather systems that may impact the territory using credible sources of information. To get real-time emergency alerts delivered to you via text message, email or via landline, sign up for Alert VI today by visiting www.vitema.vi.gov.

Calling 911 in case of emergency

Before You Ever Need Help:

- Make sure your address is clearly posted.
- Be able to provide directions to your location.
- Have a sheet with medical info kept up-to-date with health problems, medications listed, and the name and number of the doctor treating those conditions.
- St. John/St. Thomas residents should memorize alternate 9-1-1 contact number - (340)776-9110.

When You Call:

- Stay calm
- Start by giving the address
- Clearly state the emergency
- Listen to the operator's questions and instructions.
- Stay on the line until the operator says to do otherwise.
- For any "in-progress" incidents requiring law enforcement, be prepared to provide the description of suspect(s) and/or weapon(s) involved.

After You Call:

- Turn on outside lights.
- Unlock the front door.
- Clear the driveway so emergency responders have good access.
- Put any dogs or other pets in a closed room.
- Get the patient's medications together.