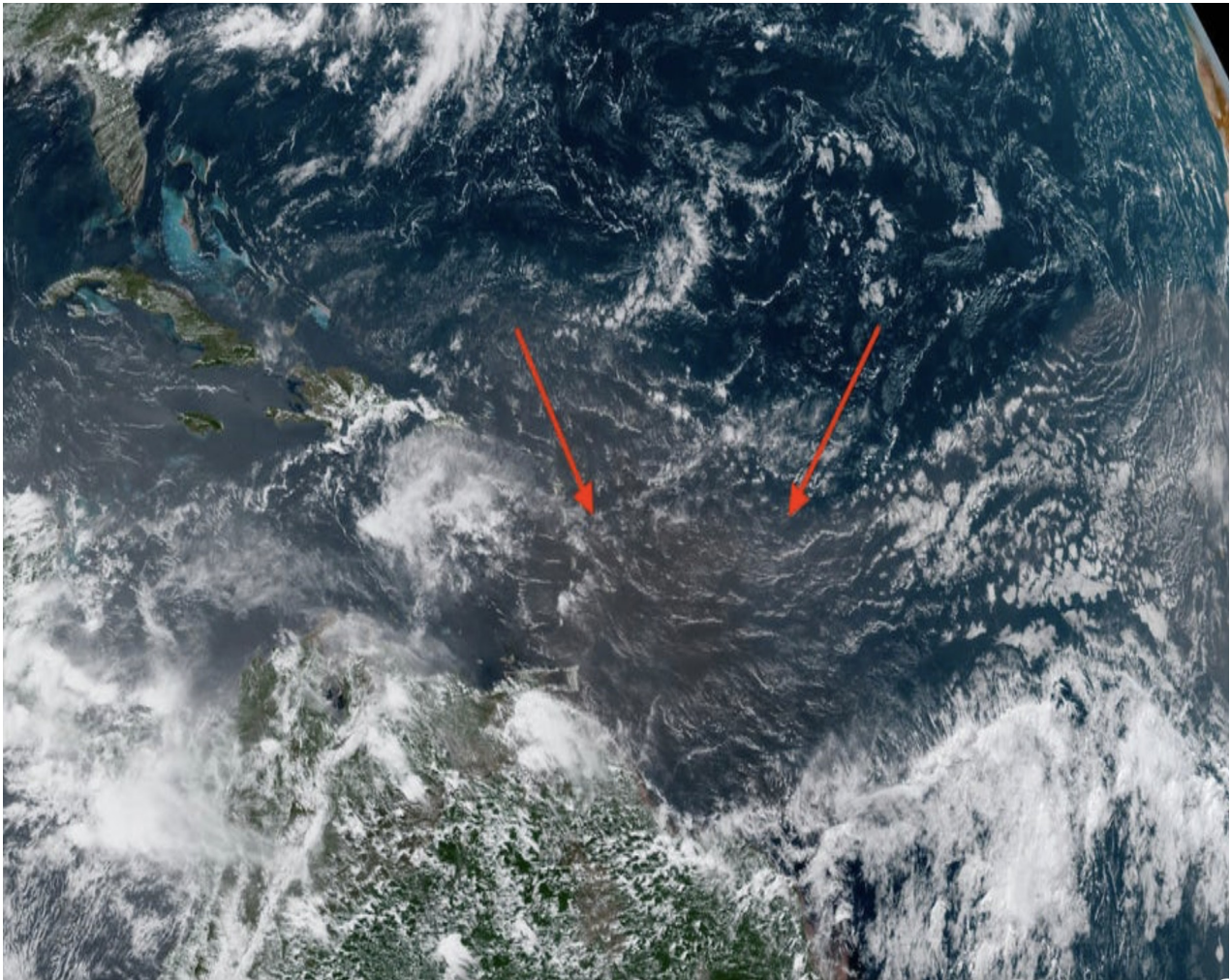


The Virgin Islands Consortium

In Comforting News, Sahara Dust Is Suppressing Storm Development In Atlantic

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While the 2019 hurricane season got off to an early start with Subtropical Storm Andrea, it may be a while before we see Barry -- the second named storm in this year's lineup -- and that's because a massive plume of Sahara dust from the coast of Africa has swept over the Atlantic Ocean.

This is good news because Saharan dust generally causes conditions to become unfavorable for tropical cyclone development. And with the U.S. Virgin Islands only two years into hurricane recovery following the devastation wrought by 2017 Hurricanes Irma and Maria, any news of hurricane development quelling is welcomed.

This, however, does not mean hurricanes won't form this season; it simply means the Saharan dust lessens the chances of development for at least the next two weeks, and could be a factor in the overall weather pattern this season.

This current plume of Saharan dust departed Africa on Father's Day and quickly moved westward into the tropical Atlantic, according to weather forecasts. It appeared on GOES-16 satellite imagery Thursday afternoon off the coast of northern South America.

Known as the Saharan Air Layer (SAL), the dry dust plume commonly forms from late spring through early fall, moving out into the tropical Atlantic Ocean about every three to five days, according to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Hurricane Research Division (HRD).

Research has been done on how SAL can affect the development of tropical storms and hurricanes. According to NOAA, some of the potential impacts to tropical development [caused by the SAL include:](#)

- The dry air can create downdrafts (sinking air) around tropical storms and hurricanes, which may result in the weakening of tropical cyclones.
- Strong winds associated with the SAL can contribute to increased vertical wind shear – the change in wind speed with height – which makes the environment hostile for tropical cyclone development.
- The role dust plays in tropical storm and hurricane intensity is not known. However, some research says it might impact cloud formation.