

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Course Builds Stronger Path to Fortifying Building Codes

Community Center / **Published On November 20, 2019 07:10 AM /**

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Utilizing FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funding, the V.I. Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) recently provided its Division of Building Permits staff a chance to strengthen their knowledge during a four-day International Code Council (ICC) Building Inspector Academy, FEMA has announced.

The course, taught by ICC Learning Center's instructors John Gibson and Steve Van Note, covered a range of topics including code administration, building planning and public safety.

Douglas Hodge, DPNR's Division of Building Permits director, said the course provided the agency's site inspectors more expertise and support with its mission of being more resilient. "The rebuilding of our territory is geared toward building stronger, more resilient and safe homes, buildings and structures that can withstand a higher wind and seismic load impose upon them during future events," said Hodge.

DPNR's unit chiefs for building inspections Amanda Jackson-Acosta, St. Croix, and Ronald Regueiro, St. Thomas, both said the course provided their teams opportunities to strengthen their expertise with inspections across the territory. "The course has really helped broaden students' knowledge in regards to different types of construction. An example is basements and crawl spaces. I see them a lot on St. Croix, but on St. Thomas they may not be typical," said Jackson-Acosta.

The ICC course provided Regueiro and classmates a chance to refine skills they have been implementing across the territory. "The course offers the ability to use and navigate through code books. That's the most important thing. That's a unique skill that you develop over time. The more you learn and navigate how different chapters work together then it is easier to go through the book and find information that you need in a timely manner," said Regueiro.

ICC instructors Gibson and Van Note both emphasized the course's importance for strengthening building inspections across the territory. "The main thing is becoming comfortable and familiar with using IRC residential codes. We are teaching them where things are located. How to navigate. How to look up information. It is important students get to the right location in book to see what minimum code requirements are," said Van Note.

This class represents an ongoing collaboration between FEMA and DPNR to strengthen the resilience for infrastructure to withstand disasters across the Virgin Islands.

"We are in a high-risk area for hurricanes, earthquakes seismic events, inland and coastal flooding. The weather forecasters predict that what is to come can be even more severe. Therefore, we must continue to build stronger and enforce codes to meet minimum code requirements compliance and in conjunction with additional requirements implemented for stronger and more resilient homes, buildings and structures," said Hodge.