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FEMA Leadership Visits USVI and Puerto Rico, Discusses Recovery Goals

Disaster Recovery / **Published On January 29, 2021 06:23 AM /**

Staff Consortium **January 29, 2021**

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A home in St. John following Hurricane Irma in 2017 By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM

The Federal Emergency Management Agency said Friday that Region II Acting Administrator David Maurstad visited Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands this week to engage in a series of conversations with government officials from both territories about ongoing recovery and preparedness efforts. This is Maurstad's first visit to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands since being assigned to his position.

“Our top priority is to reduce disaster suffering, and this visit reinforced our commitment to our partners to ensure that we achieve results. As a result of this visit, we have strengthened our

priorities with our partners, which puts us on the path to success,” said Maurstad.

As part of the visit to Puerto Rico, the federal official spoke with Governor Pedro Pierluisi at La Fortaleza about the various disasters that have affected the island. They also discussed FEMA's goals for the year, which include completing all site inspections for Hurricane Maria and the earthquakes projects, as well as ensuring the majority of projects are obligated.

“These meetings are essential for the work on the island and allow the recovery to move forward at a steady pace. Together we will ensure that this historic recovery will benefit all of Puerto Rico,” said Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands José Baquero Tirado.

According to the release, the FEMA team also met with Federal and Commonwealth staff visiting various FEMA offices on the island and at the Agency distribution center, where preparedness and readiness activities for the 2021 hurricane season were discussed. In both Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, key projects to complete in 2021 were identified, which will enhance the capabilities of the Puerto Rico Emergency Management Bureau and the Virgin Island Territorial Emergency Management Agency.

A meeting was also held with the Puerto Rico National Guard to discuss the coordination related to COVID-19 vaccination work on the island. For the Adjutant General of Puerto Rico, Major General José J. Reyes, the meeting was an important step in the efforts to slow the spread of the virus and added that “for the past four years, FEMA has been a determining factor in the recovery of our Island. Now, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the agency's collaboration has been fundamental in this fight for the well-being of our citizens. Each of us is an important part of the process of stopping this pandemic.”

The visit to the neighboring islands of St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix, on the other hand, included a meeting with the U.S. Virgin Islands Governor, Albert Bryan, Jr., as well as other territorial officials. There, the team was able to see progress first-hand at the Estate Fortuna Fire Station, the George Simmons Terrace Community Center and the Juan F. Luis Hospital temporary facility, which is nearly completed.

“This visit reinforced FEMA’s commitment to the USVI and ensures that the Territory is postured to achieve key milestones in 2021,” said Acting Director for the U.S. Virgin Islands Joint Recovery Office, John Covell.

FEMA said it has prioritized its investment in the Caribbean to ensure their recoveries are successful as it continues to help people before, during and after disasters.