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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Participate in Training Mission in USVI Focused on Emergency Electricity in Case of Hurricanes

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Sgt. Drake Hupf, (from left), Sgt. Joe Aldana and Pvt. Cameron Depew, of the Alpha Company of the 249th Engineer Battalion of the U.S Army Corps of Engineers, conduct an electrical assessment of a critical facility on St. Croix during their training mission. By. FEMA/MARK A. WALTERS

In July, soldiers from the Alpha Company of the 249th Engineer Battalion of the U.S Army Corps of Engineers spent a week in the U.S. Virgin Islands honing their electric power assessment skills as part of a training mission, FEMA has announced. There were ten soldiers and two senior non-commissioned officers from the battalion assigned to the training mission.

Ensuring emergency power is available for critical facilities such as hospitals, evacuation shelters and power plants is a challenge after disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes -- especially on islands outside the continental United States.

Over seven days, four teams of soldiers completed 77 electrical assessments at critical facilities identified by the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency throughout the territory, according to the release. Two teams were assigned to the St. Thomas/St. John District and two teams were assigned to the St. Croix District.

Assessments focused on critical loads and full loads for emergency power requirements and where emergency generators would be connected to the facility after a disaster.

"The 249th Engineers' assessment of emergency power requirements at many of our key governmental critical infrastructure facilities located on all four islands is invaluable. The information gathered jump-starts the requesting process following a major natural disaster for federal assistance with emergency power generation. Both the local and federal governments have one common listing," said VITEMA Director Daryl Jaschen. "Together we now know key facility locations to include GPS locations, their power requirements, and the status of the current generator or in some cases, know there will be an immediate need, as there is not backup power. Ultimately this assessment goes a long way in both saving lives and keeping the government operational."

Sites assessed included:

- Myrah Keating Smith Community Health Center and George Simmons Terrace Community Center on St. John,
- Schneider Regional Medical Center and the Randolph Harley Plant and Seven Seas Reverse Osmosis Plant on St. Thomas,
- D.C. Canegata Multipurpose Recreation Center and Educational Complex on St. Croix.

"Having the opportunity to travel and train in a completely different environment better prepares the soldiers for the actual disaster response. This is also a win for the territory because we believe that this also better prepares the territory in readying for a disaster by pre-identifying the power needs for critical facilities," said Master Sgt. Victor Walker, who led the training mission for the battalion.

An electrical assessment identifies the power needs for a facility, where the power panels are located, what is required to connect a generator to the facility and the location where the generator would be placed along with notes and reference photos, according to FEMA.

"The 249th Alpha Company training mission used actual critical facilities identified by VITEMA to meet its training goals. Conducting this during blue skies reduces the timeline for assessment to installation if there is a requirement for temporary emergency power," said Chris Gallagher, Operations Branch Director for Region 2's Incident Management Assistance Team. "Having the opportunity to bring FEMA, USACE, VITEMA and those responsible for critical infrastructure in the USVI together provides an important opportunity to be better prepared pre- and post-disaster if temporary emergency power is needed," said Gallagher.

Gallagher and Kevin Edwards, Operations Section Chief from Region 2 IMAT directly supported the battalion during its mission, according to the release. The training mission was coordinated by

FEMA Caribbean Area Office Coordinator Mark A. Walters and VITEMA Director Jaschen.

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