

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Yet Another Earthquake, This Time Magnitude 5.2 Hits Puerto Rico; Many Sleeping Outside in Tents as Island Struggles to Regain Power

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Puerto Ricans sleep in tents outside as the island struggles to regain power and homes have been flattened by multiple earthquakes

Puerto Rico can't seem to catch a break as deadly earthquakes continue to mercilessly pummel the already struggling island commonwealth. At 6:26 p.m. Friday, the U.S. territory was hit with a 5.2-magnitude earthquake, followed by a two more since that time — magnitudes 5.0 at 10:34 p.m. and 4.7 at 12:09 a.m. Saturday.

Images of the aftermath show homes either compromised or completely destroyed and left in piles of rubble. Other images show vehicles mangled under the weight of homes that came crumbling down from the sheer power of the natural disaster. Many Puerto Ricans are sleeping outside, some in tents, others with portable beds without proper overhead coverage. At least three people have died as a result of the earthquakes.

The Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency alert system continues to keep the Virgin Islands abreast of the developments, and none of the earthquakes have resulted in a tsunami warning. Even so, VITEMA Director Daryl Jaschen said the USVI has been placed on high alert as the volatility continues.

"While we stand ready to respond to earthquake-related hazards in our area, we are focusing in on potential earthquake generated tsunami threats," Mr. Jaschen said this week.

"The recent earthquakes in Puerto Rico are a stark reminder that we have to ensure we are prepared for more than just hurricanes," said Governor Albert Bryan. "Our prayers are with the people of Puerto Rico today, and with the many Virgin Islanders who have loved ones residing on the island. While there is no current Tsunami threat, I am urging you all to remain calm but vigilant and to please pay attention to the alerts from VITEMA."

Perhaps the most damaging and costly consequence of the powerful 6.4-magnitude that struck PR Tuesday was the vast damage to the U.S. territory's power grid. According to the Wall Street Journal, a power generation plant in Puerto Rico that provides roughly a quarter of the island's power has been substantially damaged by the earthquakes.

The Costa Sur Power Plant, the island's largest, experienced "destruction on a grand scale," said José Ortiz, executive director of the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority at a Thursday news conference, according to WSJ. The plant is located in Guayanilla, a southern municipality close to the 6.4-magnitude earthquake.

As of midday Thursday, about 50 percent of Puerto Rico had electricity—up from about a third Wednesday, Mr. Ortiz said. He said power plants will continue to be brought back into service at a rate of about one a day through Sunday. If that schedule holds, power should be restored to the entire island by the end of weekend, Mr. Ortiz said, according to WSJ.

Meanwhile in the U.S. Virgin Islands, the 44 tsunami sirens that are presently undergoing repairs will not sound if a tsunami is approaching the territory. However, VITEMA said in the event a tsunami watch or warning is issued by the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center (PTWC), it can immediately notify citizens using the Integrated Public Alert & Warning System (IPAWS). Through IPAWS, real-time emergency notifications are sent to all cellphones, cable providers and radio broadcasters connected to towers in the US Virgin Islands.

Residents are strongly encouraged to sign up to Alert VI on VITEMA's website which will provide real-time emergency notifications via cell phone calls, text messages, landlines, emails and TTY devices. Staying informed of potential threats will ensure that every available moment to react is not lost. It is important to read all Alert VI messages to

differentiate between advisories, alerts, and warnings.

Immediate recommended actions include:

- Signing up to Alert VI today at www.vitema.vi.gov
- Prepare an emergency “go-bag” for your home and vehicle today
- Practice “Drop, Cover, and Hold On” earthquake techniques with the elderly, disabled, and children
- Designate meeting points and reuniting plans should family members be in different areas at the time of an event
- Be sure that you have a battery-operated radio available if communication systems become impaired. Follow instructions provided by VITEMA and other official sources
- Find the best route to get to higher ground in all the areas that you work and spend leisure time

“As of right now, leadership is ready, communication is good, and response partnerships are committed,” said Mr. Jaschen. “If we all do something today to prepare for these threats, we will be in a better position to recover and preserve life and property in the U.S. Virgin Islands.”.