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GVI and FEMA Say They Are Ready For Hurricane Season Following Simulation of Real-Life Hurricane Response

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A home on St. John destroyed by Hurricane Irma in 2017. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM

The Government of the Virgin Islands, its agencies, and federal partners from across the country gathered in the U.S. Virgin Islands last week to finalize preparation efforts in advance of hurricane season, the Federal Emergency Management Agency said Wednesday.

In a simulation of real-life hurricane response, participants worked from Emergency Operations Centers on St. Croix, St. John and St. Thomas and FEMA facilities in the territory while practicing their ability to work together over a large area with degraded communications,

according to the release.

“For the over two years, we’ve had lots of practice working with the federal government to beat COVID-19 and we know that practice will make our response better if a hurricane brings its winds and rains to our shores,” said Governor Albert Bryan Jr. “Last week, GVI, led by VITEMA, worked together with FEMA to conduct multiple exercises to test and practice our hurricane response plans and I have been briefed on their plans for the season. While we always have more work to do, I’m confident we are moving the territory in the right direction.”

“FEMA is committed to helping Virgin Islanders before, during and after a disaster,” said Mark A. Walters, FEMA’s Virgin Islands Caribbean Area Office Coordinator. “A partnership with a focus on year-round planning with real-time response exercises puts the federal government and the territory in a position to respond to hurricanes that approach the U.S. Virgin Islands. FEMA is ready to support the U.S. Virgin Islands with requests to support the territory with its response to storms and all hazards.”

“For the past six months, we have worked closely with USVI territorial agencies and our FEMA partners to get the territory ready for hurricane season,” said Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency Director Daryl Jaschen. “As Director of VITEMA, my goal is to continue to build on our successes and identify opportunities to improve. As we continue to prepare, VITEMA reminds the Virgin Islands community to Be Prepared, to Stay Informed and Be Vigilant. VITEMA knows that the USVI community understands the importance of preparedness and moving forward, we will use new and innovative ideas to keep our community engaged and strengthen our core capabilities.”

This weeklong series of exercises is the capstone event of a nearly six month-long planning effort to prepare for the 2022 hurricane season. Preparedness is an ongoing process and last week’s event provided opportunities to integrate lessons learned from the Irma/Maria response efforts, address gaps with territorial or local resources and then identify federal resources necessary to respond to destructive storms in the territory.

Topics covered during the event included food/water distribution, patient movement, route clearance, debris removal, temporary power and power restoration, emergency responder communications as well as public information and warning, the release said.

Virgin Islanders should prepare to be self-sufficient in the immediate aftermath of a hurricane and take steps to protect their property. Those with disabilities and others with access and functional needs might have additional considerations.

Build a kit. Families should be prepared to shelter in a secure and safe location for up to five days after a disaster. Remember roads might be impassable, gas stations and grocery stores could be closed, power might be out, and communications could be interrupted.

- Store a gallon of water for each person per day for five days, for drinking and sanitation.
- Gather a five-day supply of nonperishable food and medications.
- Have enough antibiotic ointment, hygienic products, diapers and wipes available.
- Store supplies to meet the needs of individual family members, including infants and young children, seniors, persons with disabilities, and pets or service animals.
- The Virgin Islands Department of Health has recommended people include additional items in their kits to help prevent the spread of coronavirus or other viruses and the flu, items can include:

- Cloth face coverings (for everyone ages 2 and above), soap, hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes to disinfect surfaces.
- Protect important documents such as vital records, insurance policies, medical information and property and financial records, by storing copies in a safe deposit box or another location separate from your home. These items might be necessary for survivors who could be eligible to apply for disaster assistance.
- Keep your home and vehicle insured against wind and flood damage. Also, remember to update your property insurance to cover current construction costs and be aware that a property insurance policy does not offer coverage for flood damage. For more information about getting flood insurance, visit [floodsmart.gov](https://www.floodsmart.gov).

Make a Family Communications Plan. Identify alternate ways of staying in touch with loved ones.

- Choose an out-of-town friend or relative as a point of contact.
- Ensure children have emergency contacts memorized or saved in a secure place
- Determine a safe, familiar place the family can go for protection or to reunite.
- Make sure the location is in a central and accessible location for all family members, including family members with disabilities.
- If you have pets or service animals, make sure the location is animal-friendly.

For more information on making a family communication plan go to Family Communication Plan .

Stay Informed. Listen to local officials' bulletins for the most up-to-date information before, during and after a disaster. It's a good idea to have a battery or solar-powered radio to receive disaster notices and updates.

Follow VITEMA on Facebook, Twitter (@readyusvi) and on TikTok (vitema_usvi) to receive up-to-date preparedness and emergency information.

Also, sign up for emergency alerts and notifications on www.vitema.vi.gov . You can get emergency alerts delivered to you via text message or email.

Download the FEMA app on your smartphone and receive real-time alerts from the National Weather Service for up to five locations nationwide. Check the settings on your mobile phones to make sure you can receive Wireless Emergency Alerts, which require no sign-up.