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Fiona Could Become Hurricane as it Moves Near Puerto Rico; USVI to See Up to 6 Inches of Rain, 40-60 mph Winds With Gusts Reaching 85 mph

Hurricane Season / **Published On September 17, 2022 06:36 AM /**

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The National Weather Service's Sandwich visual of Tropical Storm FIONA on Sept. 17, 2022 By. NOAA/NESDIS//STAR GOES-East ABI SANDWICH

Tropical Storm Fiona is gaining strength as it moves over the northeastern Caribbean, and the National Hurricane Center has placed Puerto Rico under a hurricane watch even as the USVI and PR remain under a tropical storm warning.

"A Tropical Storm Warning remains in effect for Puerto Rico, Vieques, Culebra and the USVI. Some strengthening is forecast, and Fiona could be near hurricane strength when it moves near Puerto Rico. For that reason, a Hurricane Watch has been issued for Puerto Rico, including

Vieques, and Culebra," said the National Weather Service, Puerto Rico branch at 6:00 a.m. Saturday.

"Heavy rainfall remains as the main concern this weekend into early next week; 5 to 10 inches of rain is expected for Puerto Rico with locally higher amounts up to 16 inches across southern and eastern sections, and up to 6 inches across the US Virgin Islands. Sustained winds of 45-60 mph with hurricane-force wind gusts up to 85 mph are possible," NWS said.

Hazardous marine and coastal conditions are expected, with building seas of up to 15 feet and occasional higher seas. Large breaking waves between 10 to 15 feet will generate dangerous surf conditions and life-threatening rip currents.

The storm's current location is 16.4 N, 63.3 W, or about 125 miles west of Guadeloupe, and 135 miles southeast of St. Croix.

A Tropical Storm Warning is in effect for St. Kitts, Nevis, Montserrat, and Anguilla, Saba and St. Eustatius, St. Maarten, Guadeloupe, St. Barthelémy, and St. Martin, Puerto Rico, including Vieques and Culebra, U.S. Virgin Islands, British Virgin Islands, South coast of the Dominican Republic from Cabo Engano westward to Cabo Caucedo, North coast of the Dominican Republic from Cabo Engano westward to Puerto Plata.

Fiona is moving toward the west near 13 mph (20 km/h). A westward to west-northwestward motion with a decrease in forward speed is expected through Sunday night. A turn toward the northwest is forecast early next week. On the forecast track, the center of Fiona is expected to move near or just south of the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico today through Sunday, and approach the southern or eastern coast of the Dominican Republic Sunday night and Monday.

Maximum sustained winds are near 60 mph (95 km/h) with higher gusts. Some strengthening is forecast, and Fiona could be near hurricane strength when it moves near Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic this weekend.

Tropical-storm-force winds extend outward up to 125 miles (205 km) from the center. A wind gust of 45 mph (72 km/h) was recently reported at F.D. Roosevelt Airport on Sint Eustatius.

NOAA and Air Force Hurricane Hunter aircraft are scheduled to investigate Fiona this morning.

Key Message

Fiona is expected to encounter slightly more favorable environmental conditions over the next 24-48 h. In particular, the westerly shear that has plagued Fiona for days is forecast to weaken, which could allow the cyclone's structure to improve and become more vertically aligned. The latest intensity guidance is stronger than the previous cycle, and the NHC forecast has been adjusted upward during the first 36 h of the period. Fiona could be at or near hurricane force when it passes near Puerto Rico later this weekend, and a Hurricane Watch has been issued to account for this potential. If current trends continue, further increases to the intensity forecast may be necessary on future cycles. Some brief weakening is possible due to interaction with the mountainous terrain of Hispaniola, but re-strengthening seems likely once Fiona moves over the southwestern Atlantic next week. The NHC intensity forecast has been raised on days 3-5 in line with the latest consensus aids.

Rainfall: Fiona is forecast to produce the following rainfall:

- Leeward Islands and Northern Windward Islands: Additional 2 to 4 inches.
- British and U.S. Virgin Islands: 4 to 6 inches with local 10 inches possible.
- Puerto Rico: 5 to 10 inches with local 16 inches possible, particularly across eastern and southern Puerto Rico.
- Dominican Republic: 4 to 8 inches with 12 inches possible, particularly on the far eastern coast.
- Haiti: 1 to 3 inches with isolated maximum totals of 4 inches.
- Turks and Caicos: 4 to 10 inches.

Localized coastal flooding is also possible elsewhere in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. For information specific to your area, please see products issued by your local National Weather Service forecast office.

Surf: Swells generated by Fiona are affecting the Leeward Islands, the northern Windward Islands, the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. Swells will spread westward to the northern coast of Hispaniola, the Turks and Caicos Islands, and the southeastern Bahamas over the weekend. These conditions could cause life-threatening surf and rip current conditions. Please consult products from your local weather office.

Message from Governor Albert Bryan

Governor Albert Bryan, while cautioning residents of the territory prepare for the weather system, announced that ports will remain open.

Sea ports including ferries operating between St. Thomas and St. Johns will remain open until 10:00 p.m. Friday while airports are not forecast to close though cancellation of flights, he said, can be expected.

“So far, there’s no indication that the airports are going to be closed but realistically speaking with 40-45 mph/50mph wind, if you have a flight scheduled tomorrow, it’s more than likely going to be cancelled,” he said during a storm update press briefing Friday.

Given the current trajectory of the storm, there are no plans to implement curfews either but residents have been advised to stay home.

“As you know, it’s been dry for a while so we expect that when it starts to rain boulders, especially over in St. Johns-St Thomas where it’s mountainous, are going to be coming loose — things are going to get washed away; trees will fall, hopefully no poles will,” he continued.

The government has been distributing sand bags to people who are not mobile and are continuing gutter cleaning.

Banks Closed

Firstbank VI and Banco Popular will be closed Saturday as a result of Tropical Storm Fiona's impending impact to the USVI, the banks made known in separate releases Friday.

FirstBank

FirstBank advised the general public that all branches will be closed tomorrow, Saturday, September 17th due to the impending weather conditions associated with Tropical Storm Fiona.

The bank said it anticipates that regular business hours will resume on Monday, September 19th. "Please stay connected to the FirstBank VI Facebook page and local media for further operational updates," the bank said.

Clients are reminded that accounts can be accessed online 24/7 through the Digital Banking platform. For more information, please visit www.1firstbank.com.

Popular

Banco Popular said its Sunny Isles branch on St. Croix and the Main Branch in St. Thomas will remain closed on Saturday, September 17. All other branches within the Region, including the British Virgin Islands branches, are closed during the weekends, as part of normal operations.

The bank's ATMs will continue to operate and remain available according to weather conditions.

"We will resume operations on Monday if there are no major consequences due to the passing of Tropical Storm Fiona," Popular said.

For more information, access Mi Banco Online by visiting www.popular.com or call TeleBanco at (787)724-3650 or 1-888-724-3650.

Oriental Bank

Oriental Bank announced that its St. Thomas and St. Croix branches will be closed Saturday, September 17th due to tropical storm conditions. The branches will reopen Monday.

For updates on bank hours and operations visit Oriental's Facebook page [OrientalBankUSVI](https://www.facebook.com/OrientalBankUSVI) and media outlets. Customers can access their accounts and make transactions in a several ways every day using any of the following methods:

- Online Banking and Mobile Banking – Check balances, make payments, and transfer funds online 24/7.
- Mobile Banking customers can deposit checks using their smartphone cameras, verify balances and transactions, make payments and transfers, and send money to other people.
- Make Loans Payments Online – Customers can make their payments through My Payments for personal loans, car loans and leases, even if they do not have a deposit account with us. Customers can access through orientalbank.com/usvi.
- Balances, transfers, recent transactions, and other services: Use our automated telephone service at 1-866-622-6800, available 24/7.
- ATMs - Customers can check balances, make withdrawals, and transfer funds between accounts.