

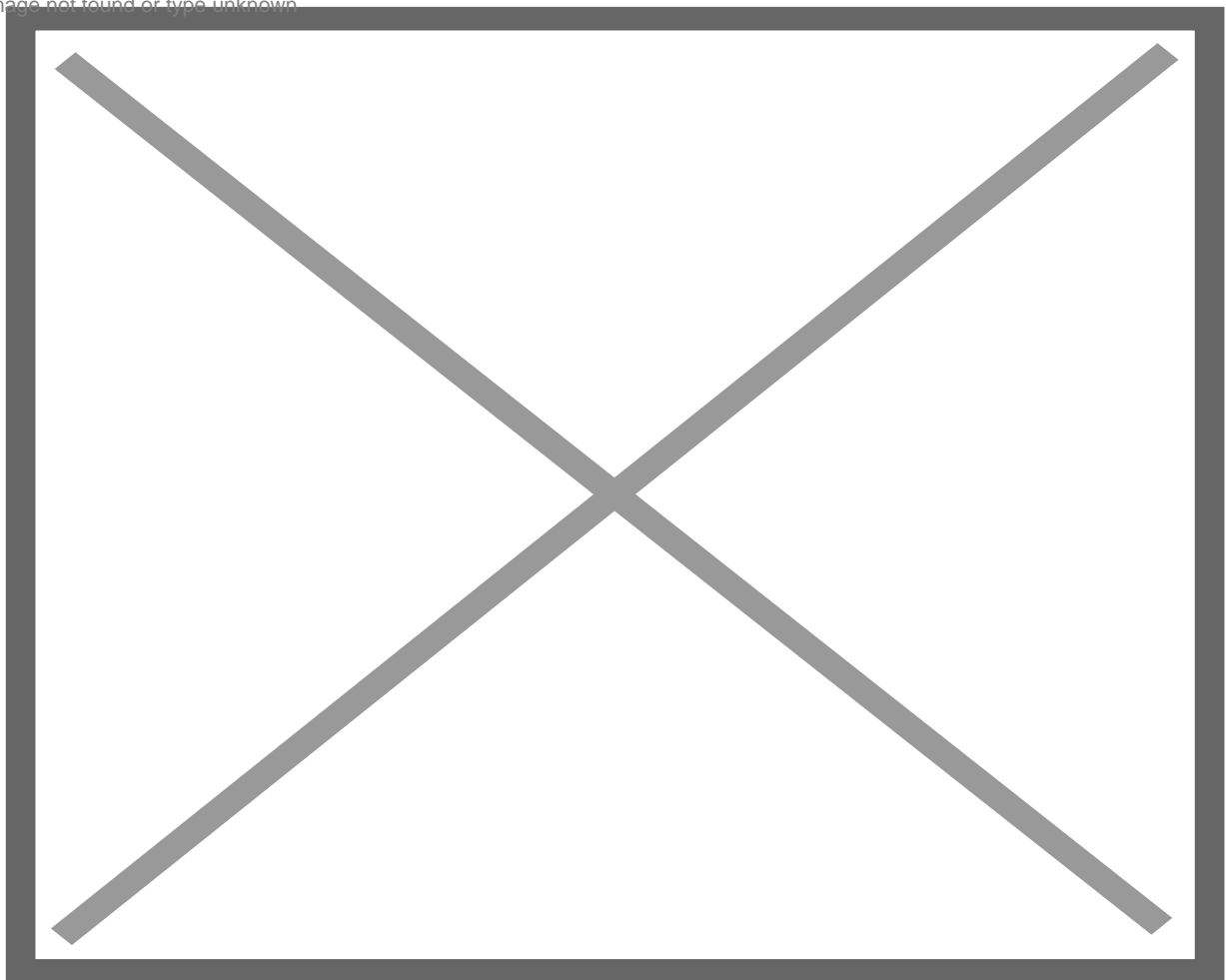
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Fiona Becomes Hurricane Over Puerto Rico, Moving Away From USVI; Bryan Advises Residents to Stay Home; Flash Flood Warning Still in Effect For St. Croix; WAPA Says Propane Supply Back Online

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Ernice Gilbert **September 18, 2022**

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Hurricane Fiona visual from the National Hurricane Center on Sept. 18, 2022 at 11:00 a.m.

Governor Albert Bryan along with VITEMA and WAPA representatives on Sunday provided an update to the public on the impacts of Hurricane Fiona (a tropical storm at the time), which is moving away from the U.S. Virgin Islands and is now impacting Puerto Rico.

The Virgin Islands as of 11:00 a.m. Sunday remained under a tropical storm warning, however the hurricane watch has been discontinued. The weather system is trekking away from the territory and is now impacting Puerto Rico. It will then head toward the Dominican Republic which is also under a hurricane warning.

St. Croix is under a flash flood warning until 12:30 p.m. today.

The territory's seaports and both airports are closed today, with the airports putting services on pause from 6:00 p.m. Saturday, according to VITEMA Director Daryl Jaschen.

There were several WAPA outages throughout the territory, according to Mr. Jaschen, including feeders 6A, 10A, 4A, 2A, 8B, and 9B on St. Croix. Outages occurred on feeders 7A, 6A, 7C, and the Tutu Park Mall feeder in St. Thomas.

VITEMA said WAPA line personnel were being dispatched to address the outages for assessment and would begin restoration shortly. The authority also advised residents to stay indoors as it works to restore power. "Please be advised that restoration crews are urgently requesting that motorists stay off the roads as much as possible in order to allow Line Department and Public Works Personnel the space to safely and expeditiously begin debris removal and repair power lines. Excess traffic will unfortunately delay restoration activities as there is much debris such as very large downed trees to clear in the St. Croix district. Your cooperation would be greatly appreciated," WAPA said.

The Juan F. Luis Hospital switched to its generator at 12:26 a.m. Sunday and the hospital was on generator power as of 9:00 a.m. Sunday. "They reported no impacts to operations at the Juan F. Luis Hospital," Mr. Jaschen said. The 911 Emergency Call Center on St. Croix went on generator power Saturday after midnight as well, but the emergency service remains fully operational.

Mr. Jaschen called on residents to be careful, echoing Governor Albert Bryan's guidance that residents should stay indoors. Though Mr. Bryan did not implement a curfew, saying it would add undue stress to first responders already working around the clock in response to the storm, the governor said residents should stay home and perhaps watch football.

"The police and the Fire [Service], EMTs, National Guard — they have enough work to do; we don't need to create extra work for them by getting into accidents — lack of visibility, all kinds of things happen. And while I know I paved a lot of roads, there's still potholes there and you see a puddle of water, you go through it, you mashup your frontend because there's a pothole hiding," he said. "...It's a lot safer at home."

VITEMA did not receive rescue-related calls from residents, according to Mr. Jaschen, though emergency response services fielded reports of power outages as residents sought information on restoration efforts.

WAPA CEO Andrew Smith told the Consortium following this morning's press briefing that the authority's propane supplier on St. Croix, Saintnals, was experiencing some weather-related issues in making propane available to the Richmond plant. Because WAPA's operating units on St. Croix use propane, this posed a threat to the island's power supply, as diesel fuel — which is used as backup when propane is unavailable — was running low with only three days of stock left. However, the issue was rectified after Saintnals' systems came back online about 9:55 a.m. Sunday, according to WAPA. If, however, Saintnals was unable to provide propane for a protracted period, WAPA was already in talks with Ocean Point Terminals — formerly Limetree Bay Terminals — to truck diesel fuel to the WAPA power plant, Mr. Smith explained.

According to the National Hurricane Center's 11:00 a.m. forecast, the center of Hurricane Fiona was located near latitude 17.3 North, longitude 66.5 West. Fiona is moving toward the west-northwest near 8 mph (13 km/h). A northwestward motion is expected to begin later today and continue through Monday, followed by a turn toward the north-northwest on Tuesday. On the forecast track, the center of Fiona will approach Puerto Rico this morning, and move near or over Puerto Rico this afternoon or evening. Fiona will then move near the northern coast of the Dominican Republic tonight and Monday, and near or to the east of the Turks and Caicos Islands on Tuesday.

Maximum sustained winds have increased to near 80 mph (130 km/h) with higher gusts. Additional strengthening is forecast during the next 48 hours while Fiona moves near Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and over the southwestern Atlantic.

Tropical-storm-force winds extend outward up to 140 miles (220 km) and hurricane-force winds extend outward up to 30 miles (45 km) from the center. A weather station at Las Mareas, Puerto Rico, recently reported sustained winds of 62 mph (100 km/h) with a gust to 75 mph (120 km/h).

Tropical storm conditions are occurring in the U.S. and British Virgin Islands and are spreading westward across Puerto Rico. These conditions are expected to reach portions of the Dominican Republic later today. Tropical storm conditions are possible across the watch area in the Dominican Republic tonight, and in the Turks and Caicos Islands and southeastern Bahamas by early Tuesday.

British and U.S. Virgin Islands: 4 to 6 inches, maximum of 10 inches on St. Croix.

Puerto Rico: 12 to 16 inches with local maximum of 25 inches, particularly across eastern and southern Puerto Rico.

Northern and Eastern Dominican Republic: 4 to 8 inches with local maximum 12 inches, particularly along the northeast coast.

Rest of Dominican Republic and Haiti: 1 to 3 inches.

Turks and Caicos: 3 to 6 inches.

These rains will produce life-threatening flash flooding and urban flooding across Puerto Rico and the eastern Dominican Republic, along with mudslides and landslides in areas of higher terrain.

Swells generated by Fiona are affecting the Leeward Islands, the northern Windward Islands, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, the northern coast of the Dominican Republic, the Turks and Caicos Islands, and the southeastern Bahamas. These conditions could cause life-threatening surf and rip current conditions. Please consult products from your local weather office.