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DHS Encourages Pre-Registration for Hurricane Shelters, Signups for Senior Disaster Registry

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Hurricane Irma's damage in St. Thomas in 2017.

Department of Human Services Commissioner Kimberley Causey-Gomez addressed the public in a press briefing focused on disaster preparedness for the 2023 hurricane season. After reminding the public of the department's role as one of the territory's 15 Emergency Support Functions, providing mass care, housing, emergency assistance, and human services, she stressed the need for preparedness, including marking houses clearly, having a safety plan, and ensuring the readiness of essential supplies.

"Making sure you have your number on your house is important," Causey-Gomez emphasized, "and if your home is not safe, know where you can go. Are you going to go with family or

friends? Make sure you have that plan."

She also highlighted the importance of preparing an emergency kit, including toiletries, clothing, prescription medications, important documents sealed in a plastic bag, batteries, flashlights, cash, and a hand-cranked or battery-operated radio. For families with young children, she recommended having books, games, puzzles, and other entertainment.

The commissioner placed particular emphasis on being prepared to take care of pets in case of an emergency. "If you have a pet or pets, it's really important for you to have a plan for them. Some of us really love our animals. And so we should not leave them out in the cold or the heat right now because it's so hot," she said.

The DHS commissioner noted that the department has inspected all mass care evacuation shelters, in collaboration with the Red Cross, Fire/EMS, and the Departments of Health, Education, and Sports Parks and Recreation. The shelters are managed by DHS and Red Cross officials and volunteers, she noted, calling for interested members of the public to sign up as a member of the cadre of Red Cross volunteers.

Causey-Gomez revealed a new initiative for the 2023 hurricane season: pre-registration for those who know they will likely need to use the shelters in the event of a storm. A short registration form is available [online](#) for download, or interested people can call 340-715-6935 for further information. "We're requesting all Virgin Islanders interested in coming to an evacuation shelter to pre-register this time," she urged.

The commissioner also touched on the Senior Disaster Registry, intended for those 60 years old or older living alone or persons with disabilities living alone. There are about 818 people currently on the registry, meant to help government officials and agencies keep track of a demographic that is particularly vulnerable during disaster or emergency conditions. The commissioner indicated that each person currently on the registry would be called to ensure their information is accurate and up to date.

She also called on other eligible persons who are not yet on the registry to ensure that they are added to the rolls. Registration can be done over the telephone (St. Thomas: 340-774-0930 ext 4214, St. John – 340-776-6334, St. Croix: 340-773-6630) or by visiting the Bureau of Motor Vehicles or the VI Election System.

Causey-Gomez ended her address by urging the public to stay informed and be vigilant throughout the 2023 hurricane season, which runs from June through November. "Remember, this is the time to be prepared," she exhorted.