

2018 ATLANTIC HURRICANE SEASON PREPAREDNESS UPDATE

Date : September 6, 2018

St. Thomas- Members of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety, chaired by Sen. Brian Smith, held a meeting at the Capitol Building to receive testimony on preparedness for the 2018 Atlantic Hurricane Season from officials of the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) and the Virgin Islands Port Authority.

VITEMA's 2018 Hurricane Season preparedness initiatives include informing the public via radio talk shows on "Preparedness Tip of the Week" in collaboration with FEMA, launching an interactive website and Alert VI an emergency notification system that alerts residents with texts and email messages. Alert VI operates in conjunction with FEMA's Integrated Public Alert and Warning System. VITEMA is also disseminating information via social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

"Although our efforts are focused on recovery from Irma and Maria, preparedness for the 2018 Hurricane season, in accordance to the National preparedness priorities, we continue to implement and maintain preparedness initiatives such as continuing the "If You See Something, Say Something" campaign," said Mona Barnes, Director of VITEMA. "Our Tsunami's Readiness campaign and updating our training and exercise plan to include other hazards."

Sen. Smith inquired, "After experiencing two hurricanes in 2017, what are the lessons learned?" Barnes stated that there were gaps in communications, sheltering plans, a point of distribution operations, patient evacuations, temporary power, and emergency route clearance. "The 2018 Hurricane Season, assisted by Federal Funds provided through disaster programs activated by the Stafford Act," added Barnes.

Regarding the emergency shelters, Sen. Novelle Francis said, "A lot of people still have blue roofs, how many shelters are available?" Barnes stated that currently there are only two equipped shelters in the wake of a storm. VITEMA has collaborated with FEMA to obtain generators for five shelters. In total there are twelve shelters, but not all are structurally sound. FEMA's Public Assistance and Mitigation Grant programs provide funding to restore facilities.

To date, VITEMA received \$1.3 billion and is expected to acquire \$1 billion more from the Public Assistance and Mitigation awards. Some of the grant monies are used to replace/repair the emergency siren system for Tsunami alerts. VITEMA has satellite phones to communicate when a natural disaster hits the Territory. Lawmakers urged VITEMA to establish contracts with the private sector such as ferry services before the storms.

Separately, the Virgin Islands Port Authority (VIPA) shared an update on security at the airports and seaports. VIPA complies with all Federal mandates. There is adequate staffing to implement security procedures, equipment to include the server are secured. Federal Authorities such as TSA and Customs and Border Patrol assist with reinforcing rules and regulations.

PHOTOS: <http://www.legvi.org/committeemeetings/Media/>

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