Agency Update

PRESENTED BY
DARYL D. JASCHEN
DIRECTOR
VIRGIN ISLANDS TERRITORIAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Submitted to
SENATOR STEVEN D. PAYNE, Sr., CHAIRMAN
Senate Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, Public Safety & Veterans’ Affairs
Earl B. Ottley, Capital Building, St. Thomas
February 17, 2021
Good afternoon Senator Steven D. Payne, Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security, Justice, Public Safety & Veterans’ Affairs, other committee members, 34th Legislature Staff, and those in the viewing and listening audience.

I am Daryl D. Jaschen, Director of the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA). With me today are Assistant Director Barbara Petersen, Deputy Director of Operations Bruce Kelly, Deputy Director of Plans and Preparedness Regina Browne, Deputy Director of Logistics Steve DeBlasio, Deputy Director of Grants Florecita Brunn, Deputy Director of Human Resources and Labor Relations Erika Callwood, Deputy Director of Finance and Administration Winston Simon, Public Information Officer Eric Ackerson, and Director of the US Virgin Islands Fusion Center Wayne Bryan.

We have been invited here today to provide this committee an Agency Update. The last time VITEMA appeared before this Committee was October 9, 2020 to provide Testimony on the US Virgin Islands 9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) and data collection for firearms complaints.

During that Committee Hearing, VITEMA clearly indicated that any future requests for firearms complaint data should submitted to the owner of that data, the Virgin Islands Police Department. On Saturday, February 13, 2021 you sent VITEMA a request for firearms complaints covering the Island of St. John, since January 2020 and requested a three (3) day response including Saturday, Sunday, and Monday being a Federal Holiday. There is no indication in this correspondence that you notified the VIPD of this request. This request is unreasonable and demonstrates the continued lack of understanding of what was communicated during the last Committee Hearing.
9-1-1 Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs)

Even though VITEMA’s 911 Emergency Call Center Operators Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) is up-to-date and expires on September 30, 2022, as our 9-1-1 dispatch operators are part of a collective bargaining union, VITEMA has requested a Labor-Management Meeting to be held in the 2nd quarter of fiscal year 2021. The purpose of the meeting to improve our relationship with the union and moral within VITEMA.

9-1-1 dispatch operators are part of the Collective Bargaining Unit, United Steel Workers Union and salaried from the General Fund. 9-1-1 dispatchers in the Territory are not considered First Responders, even though they go through may of the same stress inducing events on their calls, as Police, Fire, and EMS responders.

9-1-1 dispatchers in their normal shift on any day do contact any number of calls from people going through their worst moments. Under the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, 9-1-1 dispatchers are classified as clerical workers.

The current starting salary for a VITEMA 9-1-1 dispatch operator is $35,629 dollars. VITEMA is always searching for individuals desiring to become 9-1-1 dispatchers. Potential 9-1-1 dispatchers must pass a written test as well as undergo a background check prior to be permanently hired by VITEMA. While there are no special positions for bilingual dispatchers, due to the diverse culture of the Territory, VITEMA encourages bilingual Spanish-English or Patois (French Creole)-English speaking individuals to apply and continues special outreach campaigns.

Funding for the operations and maintenance of the 9-1-1 PSAP is from both the Territory’s general fund and the FCC’s Emergency Service Fee (ESF) charged
monthly to mobile and land-line subscribers. Of the two dollar ($2.00) monthly fee, currently VITEMA receives 40% of the fee, or $0.80 cents and the VI Fire Service and Emergency Management Services (EMS) equally split the other 60%, or $1.20. The Territorial Public Service Commission provides regulatory oversight for payment of the fees for land-lines subscribers but does not have authority over any of the mobile phone subscribers.

Annually, VITEMA submits to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) a report providing details on the expenditure of the 40% Emergency Service Fee ensuring the funds are spent expressly on the care and maintenance of the 9-1-1 system, as defined by New and Emerging Technologies 911 Improvement Act of 2008. The FCC collects the reports and publishes a combined Annual 911 Fee Report. The most recent 11th Annual 911 Fee Report 2019 is available for download at the FCC website, www.fcc.gov, and contains data for 4,468 Primary PSAPs and 686 Secondary PSAPS, for a total of 5,154 PSAPs dependent on funding derived from the collection of 9-1-1 fees.

For the past two-years, an upgrade to the 9-1-1 Computer Aided Dispatch and Record Management System (CAD/RMS) has been underway. The CAD/RMS provides an integrated public safety enterprise solution that includes modern-day 911 Computer-aided Dispatch Services and Record Management Systems for the territory’s PSAP, Police, Fire, EMS, and Jail departments. The solution replaces the VITEMA-911 outdated SmartCAD software to meet current standards and capabilities.

The CAD/RMS project, managed by the Bureau of Information Technology (BIT), is on schedule to go-live on February 16, 2021. The solution includes the installation of new computer servers, installation of the new Computer Aided
Dispatch (CAD) and Record Management System (RMS) software, Desktop workstations for 911 dispatchers and the Bureau of Corrections. Ruggedized laptops in vehicles allows officers and firefighters to provide better and faster service. The system ties VI Police Department, VITEMA 9-1-1 dispatch, Bureau of Corrections, Emergency Medical Services, VI Fire Services, Peace Officer Standards & Training (POST), Youth Rehabilitation Center, VI Port Authority, and Superior Courts in both districts together for information sharing and provides the training of support staff and personnel on the configuration and use of the new system.

Even with the upgrade to the Motorola Spillman Flex CAD/RMS, the VITEMA 9-1-1 telecommunications phone system is on the verge of obsolescence, after 15-years of continued use by dispatchers, and is unable to take advantage of the many of the new capabilities with the new CAD/RMS system. The cost to upgrade is approximately $600,000.00 dollars and will be funded through the 40% VITEMA allowance of the Emergency Service Fee. VITEMA is developing a request for proposal to several vendors and anticipates submitting the contract by the end of the fiscal year and complete the phone upgrade by the end of the calendar year 2021.

Equipment

VITEMA’s two (2) 31-foot Mobile Emergency Operations Centers vehicles have completed a maintenance overhaul and the St. Thomas vehicle was utilized to support Governor Bryan’s State of the Territory on January 25, 2021. The St. Croix vehicle had been sent to St. Thomas for maintenance overhaul and is due back on St. Croix at the end of March 2021.
Each of VITEMA’s three (3) Emergency Operations Centers had new ice machines with three stage filters, installed and operational in February 2021. Measures are in place to test water source quality, monthly.

Two (2) new mobile light towers with 5-kw generators were received in February 2021 and located at the St. Thomas EOC. An additional two (2) mobile light towers are located at the St. John EOC.

Ten (10) 100kw mobile generators arrived to VITEMA in December 2020. Four (4) are currently located on St. Croix and six (6) are located on St. Thomas. Two (2) of the six (6) on St. Thomas will be moved to the St. John EOC after they are registered with Property & Procurement with proper asset tags and GPS trackers installed.

Following recent hurricane evacuation shelter inspections on St. Thomas and St. Croix on January 29, 2021 and St. John and Water Island on February 5, 2021, the Department of Human Services identified three (3) of the designated locations needing emergency generators. With VITEMA’s emergency service funds for 2021 and VITEMA’s new emergency generators, evaluations and engineering projects will be established to successfully position, connect, and test the emergency generators, with the goal of the sites fully prepared by the start of hurricane season on June 1, 2021. VITEMA will maintain these generators throughout hurricane season and return them back to the fleet following the end of hurricane season on November 31, 2021.

**Hurricane Irma and Maria Recovery Projects**

VITEMA has three (3) recovery projects, two (2) of which have funding obligated and one (1) with the project worksheet submitted to FEMA in February 2021. As FEMA does not view an Emergency Operations Centers as a critical infrastructure,
what was originally submitted in 2018 as an EOC retrofit on St. Croix at the former Herman Hill EOC with $22.5 million dollars obligated under Hazard Mitigation and included the relocation of the St. Croix 9-1-1 PSAP and the Bureau of Information Technology, is now re-programed by FEMA as a Safe Room. This Safe Room is to designate with 100-person capacity and must be contained within the footprint of the previous EOC structure and has a 66% reduction in obligated funding. VITEMA is now re-engaging with design teams to identify options in accordance with FEMA publication P-361 (Safe Rooms for Tornadoes and Hurricanes: Guidance for Community and Residential Safe Rooms) and ICC-500 (Standard for the Design and Construction of Storm Shelters). VITEMA is also exploring other funding options to apply for a new EOC and 9-1-1 PSAP on St. Croix.

Again, as an EOC is not considered a critical infrastructure under FEMA, it has taken over three (3) years to complete the project worksheet (PW) for the repair of the St. Thomas VITEMA EOC. The PW has been reviewed by the VITEMA and Office of Disaster Recovery Public Assistance staff and forwarded to FEMA for approval. In the meantime, VITEMA has already received bids for the repair of the roof membrane, drain gutters, and replacement of damaged windows. The VITEMA security gate has been placed back in operation and the building no longer requires an after-hours security guard. The original air-conditioning units have been repaired several times but will continue to need repair until the roof drain gutters are replaced as the water flow from the damaged gutters ends up directly on the air condition units three-floors below. The repair of the St. John building, owned by the Department of Public Works where VITEMA is the only tenant, is scheduled to begin in mid-February.
VITEMA and DPW are discussing the level of repair work needed and the impact to the ability of the building to be utilized as an EOC while repairs are underway. The repairs are expected to be completed in 3-months, but VITEMA is currently looking for an alternate EOC for hurricane season.

The Tsunami Siren Repair recovery project is a $1.6 million dollars Public Assistance 428-fixed cost with 90% federal and 10% territory cost share. To date, 50% of the project costs have been paid to the vendor. There are 44-siren sites, between St. Croix, St. Thomas, St. John and Water Island. Of the 44-sites, 42 require the sirens to be mounted on steel poles approximately 50 ft above ground and secured in concrete 8 ft below ground. Most sites will require guy-wires to stabilized against hurricane force winds, but not are guaranteed to with-stand winds typically associate with Category 5 hurricanes at greater than 155 miles per hour. All 42 steel poles arrived in the territory in January 2021 and are staged at locations on St. Thomas and St. Croix. The remaining equipment such as the sirens heads, solar panels, batteries, radio receives, and antennas are due this month. Work is scheduled to begin in March on St. Thomas and depending on time required for setting the pole foundations and guy-wires, will finish on St. Croix in June. Approximately $70,000 dollars are still needed to fund the repair of the radio repeaters on St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John, which were not included in the scope of the repair project.

VITEMA on the Air (Radio Talk, Face Book, Television)

VITEMA staff from Planning and Preparedness, Outreach, Hazard Mitigation, Public Assistance, and Public Information Office continue to engage with Radio Stations to bring urgent weather updates, inform on important public assistance such as sand-bag distribution, blue-tarp distribution, and hurricane / earthquake / tsunami preparedness and response plans for individuals, families, and
communities. Over the past 12-months VITEMA and the Department of Health have conducted joint radio station visits, press conferences, and virtual town hall meetings. Our VITEMA website has recently been updated to reflect information regarding vaccine awareness and appointment scheduling. Two annual events promoting natural hazard awareness and involving individual and group participation are The Great Shake-Out in October, bringing earthquake awareness, and Caribe Wave in March bringing Tsunami awareness. The next Caribe Wave 21 (Tsunami Regional Exercise) is scheduled for Thursday, March 11 and VITEMA encourages individuals and groups to sign up at www.vitema.vi.gov. VITEMA is also running public service announcement on preparedness for Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training, Earthquakes, and Tsunami.

At this time, I would like to play for the committee three (3) of our current public service announcements. These announcements are about the CERT training program, earthquake preparation & response, and tsunami preparation & response. [PAUSE FOR PSAs]

The Tsunami maps for St. Croix, St. Thomas/Water Island, and St. John are being updated to reflect improvements based on the recommendations by the University of the Virgin Islands Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Team. They will show improved evacuation route recommendations and better graphics representation.

Emergency Management Accreditation

VITEMA is well underway in developing required documented processes and procedures in accordance with the International Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP) Standard ANSI/EMAP EMS 5-2019. We have eight (8) staff members who have completed the EMAP educational program and
an addition two staff member currently enrolled. The Office of the Governor has also had key staff members completed the training program. Of the four (4) required documentation plans (Emergency Operations, Recovery, Continuity of Operations, and Continuity of Government), VITEMA is nearing completion on three and is scheduled to begin in March the Continuity of Government Plan. Last August, the EMAP accreditation team, along with FEMA staff support, completed the initial assessment of the Continuity of Operations and Continuity of Government plans and provided a written report of recommend improvements. Once all the plans are complete, VITEMA will need approximately 6-months to follow its plans and show evidence through documentation and records of compliance. Key events such as exercising Emergency Operations and Continuity of Operations plans are required before an accreditation visit is scheduled. As part of the program, VITEMA has identified three (3) essential functions and built its plans and training program around them. They are (1) lead and operate the Territory’s 9-1-1 communications centers, (2) lead the Territory’s emergency response efforts during major disasters and emergencies, and (3) lead and coordinate the Territory’s emergency recovery efforts following a disaster.

**Emergency Management Council**

As required in the VI Code, VITEMA holds a monthly Emergency Management Council meeting, inviting lead and supporting emergency support function agencies, of which there are 65 agencies per the VITEMA Territorial Emergency Operations Plan, plus key federal stake holders, representatives from the legislative and judicial branches, and the office of the Delegate to Congress. For the past 11 months these meetings have been conducted using the MS Teams platform and
have focused on hurricane, earthquake, tsunami, and pandemic preparation and response efforts.

In closing, VITEMA continues to full-fill its mission as a first response coordinator focused on saving lives and property of the territory’s population by preparing territorial organizations to respond to, recover from and mitigate against all-hazards. We continue to provide planning, coordinating, training, and exercise activities at the single agency level, multi-agency local level, and multi-agency integrated local and federal level. I am very proud of each member of VITEMA, our leadership team, and the continued support of Governor Albert Bryan, Jr. and Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach towards keeping the Territory prepared for both advance notice threats such as hurricanes, floods, pandemics and no-notice threats such as earthquakes, tsunamis, cyber-attacks, hazardous material release, and potential active shooter events.

Thank you, Committee Chairman, Senator Steven D. Payne, for this opportunity to provide a VITEMA agency update. My team and I are prepared to address any questions you may have at this time.