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Governor Ricardo Rosselló: It is time to act and evacuate

Puerto Rico Governor Ricardo Rosselló announced the Government of Puerto Rico has prepared 500 shelters for people who cannot stay with relatives or friends during the passage of Hurricane Maria, which intensified to Category 5 Monday night.

"No generation has seen a hurricane like this since San Felipe II in 1928. This is an unprecedented atmospheric system. I want to remind you that the Emergency Management team will not be available to help you once the winds reach 50 miles per hour. We need to keep in mind that we must also protect the lives of these first responders. It's time to act and look for a safe place if you live in flood-prone areas or in wooden or vulnerable structures," stated Governor Rosselló.

The National Weather Service (NWS) reported that from midday Tuesday, Puerto Rico will begin to experience tropical storm-force winds,

Ernesto Morales, a meteorologist at the NWS, reported that sustained hurricane winds extend 30 miles from the center. Even if there is a slight deviation from the storm's trajectory, the entire Island will experience hurricane-force winds.

The meteorologist said that there will be between 12 to 18 inches of rainfall, and in isolated areas up to 24 inches. Precipitation is expected to last for two days.

The executive director of the Puerto Rico State Agency for Emergency and Disaster Management (AEMEAD, per its Spanish acronym), Abner Gómez, notified that the shelter in the Convention Center in Miramar will be open for people who are bedridden or require special care.

"During the past few hours, people have gone to the Convention Center seeking shelter. For the moment, priority will be given to people with special medical needs," explained Gómez.

A person with special needs is one who relies on an artificial respirator, medical equipment that requires electricity, or dialysis patients, for example.

The first option should be to take refuge in the home of relatives or friends. If this is not possible, they should go to the nearest shelter in the town where they reside.

Puerto Rico Housing Secretary Fernando Gil expressed concern that there are only 299 people in shelters around the Island. In Salinas there are 27 people in shelters, 104 in Ponce, 121 in the Convention Center, and 50 in Canóvanas.

These shelters have the capacity for 66,826 people and emergency capacity for 133,352 people. Due to the magnitude of this hurricane, people who come to the state shelters should be prepared to stay there for several days. It is recommended they bring comforters and pillows to

ensure a more comfortable stay because, in case of a major emergency, there could be a shortage of cots.

The secretary of the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (DRNA, per its Spanish acronym), Tania Vázquez, reported that work was done yesterday on the cleaning of canals, streams, and basins in 16 municipalities, including Vega Baja and Loíza. Other municipalities will see the work completed today: Arecibo, Camuy, Florida, Aguadilla, Villalba, Santa Isabel, Ponce, Arroyo, Moca, Mayagüez, Aguada, Aibonito, Hormigueros, Guayama, Luquillo, and Fajardo.

However, the governor warned that, because a large amount of rain is expected, the recommendation is to evacuate flood-prone areas.

Municipalities are expected to complete the evacuation process Tuesday morning.

For information and help, citizens can call (787) 724-0124 or 311 and, in case of an emergency, 911.

Governor Rosselló clarified that it is inaccurate that water and power services will be suspended today, as rumored in social networks yesterday.

The president of the Puerto Rico Aqueducts and Sewers Authority (PRASA), Elí Díaz, reported that at 3:00 p. m. today, PRASA generators will be protected. 1,800 customers will be affected in Lomas del Sol, Linda Gardens, Camarones Centro, Santa Clara, and Hollywood Hills in Guaynabo; Los Cottos in San Juan, Barrio Nuevo 3 in Bayamón, Terrenos in Trujillo Alto, Sonadora Palmazola in Aguas Buenas, Hormigas in Caguas, and Gino in Luquillo.

The airports in Ponce and Aguadilla will close today at 6:00 p.m., while the Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport will close at 7:00 p.m.

An exemption will be granted to allow citizens to take their own bags to the ice plants, in case these businesses run out of bags.

The secretary of the Puerto Rico Treasury, Raúl Maldonado, announced an agreement was reached with transporters to expedite the lifting of merchandise at the docks, according to the Internal Revenue Bulletin No. 17-19. This ensures perishable food and basic necessities are available to the citizens.

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