

ST. THOMAS AIRPORT SET TO REOPEN FOR COMMERCIAL FLIGHTS THURSDAY

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS - The Cyril E. King Airport on St. Thomas is expected to reopen for commercial flights on Thursday, September 28, U.S. Virgin Islands Governor Kenneth E. Mapp announced Monday.

Speaking with reporters at his daily press conference, Governor Mapp commended the Virgin Islands Port Authority and the Department of Tourism for their work in getting the airport up and running under difficult circumstances. Flight schedules are to be determined by the respective airlines, and the Governor urged travelers to arrive four hours before departure to ensure passengers can be processed in time. He reported that travelers will clear U.S. Customs on arrival and not in the U.S. Virgin Islands this week. Plans are underway to open the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport on St. Croix next week.

Governor Mapp met with the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), William B. "Brock" Long, federal Homeland Security Advisor Tom Bossert and other officials on St. Croix to further discuss the Territory's reconstruction and recovery efforts. The Governor announced he has made a formal request to FEMA and President Donald J. Trump for support of the Territory's request to Congress for a special community disaster relief loan.

The Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (WAPA) has executed agreements for a first phase total of 240 linemen to assist with the Territory's reconstruction. WAPA officials are working with federal partners to transport crews and equipment to the Territory to restore power as rapidly as possible. In his talks with federal officials, Governor Mapp emphasized the importance of building resilience into the power distribution system.

Governor Mapp said he and his emergency management teams are focused on solving housing issues, and getting the blue roof project - already established in St. Thomas and St. John - off the ground in St. Croix. An interim solution for some damaged or destroyed roofs may be more durable tarps, the Governor said, explaining that a permanent fix will take more time, as FEMA and insurance providers must assess damages.

"The target objective at this point is to get you in a dry, secure house - a place you can stay, where your remaining items are secure, where you can sleep at night and not worry and, more importantly, as the Water and Power Authority comes through, a place where we can get you connected to power," he said.

Governor Mapp announced he will include representatives from the St. Croix business community in a hurricane recovery task force originally formed in the St. Thomas/St. John district following Hurricane Irma. The Governor says the expanded task force, to be named the Virgin Islands Hurricane Recovery Task Force, will address the economy and other issues affecting both districts. The Governor said he expects to be able to announce the additional members of the task force next Monday.

Executive Director of the Virgin Islands Waste Management Authority Roger Merritt said his teams will continue to add capacity to all four islands to collect and dispose of garbage, noting that residents are generating four to five times more waste than before the hurricanes. He asked for only household waste to be deposited at bin sites for the time being. Director Merritt commended Waste Management Authority staff and contractors for working from "sun up to sundown" to collect trash.

Commissioner of Health Dr. Michelle Davis reported medical evacuations were continuing for patients of the Gov. Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center on St. Croix to facilities in Atlanta, Georgia, and Shreveport, Louisiana, in collaboration with FEMA.

Commissioner Davis underscored the need for residents to take care of their mental health, recommending that anyone experiencing psychological distress as a result of the hurricanes call the helpline 1-800-985-5990 (press 2 for Spanish). The helpline provides free, confidential and multilingual counseling and crisis support. Residents can also reach the helpline via SMS by texting *talkwithus* (for English) or *hablanos* (for Spanish) to 1-212-461-4635 .

Federal Coordinating Officer of FEMA Region II William (Bill) Vogel reported FEMA has to date discharged 3.6 million meals, 1.3 million liters of water, 15,000 rolls of blue sheeting for blue roofs, 18 infant toddler kits, and has connected 27 generators.

Governor Mapp commended the people of the Virgin Islands for the long hours they are expending to assist with the Territory's recovery. "Think about the shared sacrifice that's really needed in this community as we go through recovery," the Governor said, imploring residents to be considerate of their neighbors and not run loud generators late at night, for example.

The 24-hour curfew on St. Croix will be suspended again from noon to 4 p.m. on Tuesday, September 26. The 6 p.m. to 9 a.m. curfew for the St. Thomas/St. John district remains in effect.

Residents can register for disaster assistance by calling 1-800-621-3362 or visiting www.disasterassistance.gov.

The official website to donate to the U.S. Virgin Islands recovery effort is usvirecovery.org.

Other resources for information include:

Government House: informusvi.com

VITEMA: vialert.gov

VITEMA Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/vitema>

Government House Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/GovernmentHouseUSVI/>

The Department of Tourism: www.usviupdate.com

Emergency Operation Centers:

(340) 773-2244 (St. Croix)

(340) 776-2244 (St. John)

(340) 774-2244 (St. Thomas)

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