

FEMA Disaster Assistance Will Not Affect Social Security or Other Benefits

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ST. CROIX, Virgin Islands – Hurricane survivors who receive federal disaster assistance will not pay additional taxes, lose their Social Security or disability benefits, or face a reduction in benefits from any other income-based program.

Virgin Islanders affected by Hurricane Irma or Hurricane Maria may be eligible for grants through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Individual Assistance program for temporary housing, emergency home repairs, the replacement of damaged personal property and other disaster-related needs, such as medical, dental or transportation costs, not covered by insurance or other grants. Eligibility for assistance is not dependent on income.

The grants are not considered additional income by the Internal Revenue Service and, therefore, will not be taxed. Furthermore, FEMA disaster assistance will not jeopardize Social Security or Medicare benefits, and it will not affect an applicant's eligibility for Medicaid or SNAP food benefits.

"A federal grant has no effect on a survivor's benefits or sources of income, so please go ahead and register with FEMA," said Federal Coordinating Officer William Vogel. "Virgin Islanders don't have to sacrifice their benefits in order to receive FEMA disaster assistance."

Virgin Islanders who have not yet registered with FEMA can do so at any of the nine Disaster Recovery Centers across the islands, online at www.DisasterAssistance.gov or by phone at 800-621-3362 or (TTY) 800-462-7585. Those who use 711-Relay or Video Relay Services may call 800-621-3362.

Disaster Recovery Centers are open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday. For locations, go to <http://asd.fema.gov/inter/locator/home.htm>. The toll-free telephone numbers operate from 7 a.m. to



11 p.m. (local time) seven days a week until further notice. Operators are standing by to assist survivors in English, Spanish and many other

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Disaster recovery assistance is available without regard to race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, disability, English proficiency or economic status. If you or someone you know has been discriminated against, call FEMA toll-free at 800-621-3362 (voice, 711/VRS - Video Relay Service) (TTY: 800-462-7585). Multilingual operators are available (press 2 for Spanish).

FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.

For official information on the recovery effort following the hurricanes, please visit www.informusvi.com or www.usviupdate.com. Follow us on social media at twitter.com/femaregion2 and www.facebook.com/FEMAUSVirginIslands.

To donate or volunteer, contact the voluntary or charitable organization of your choice through the National Voluntary Agencies Active in Disasters (NVOAD) at www.nvoad.org. For those who wish to help, cash donations offer voluntary agencies the most flexibility in obtaining the most-needed resources and pumps money into the local economy to help businesses recover. The Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands also has the "Fund for the Virgin Islands" at www.USVIrecovery.org.

