

# FEMA Celebrates 45th Anniversary with Commitment to Community and Service

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**ST. CROIX, U.S. Virgin Islands** -- FEMA is proud to announce its 45th anniversary, marking over four decades of dedicated service to communities across the United States, including the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Since its inception, April 1, 1979, FEMA has been steadfast in its mission to support and assist communities in times of need. As part of this commitment, FEMA staff are not only employees but also residents of the communities they serve. Their deep-rooted connection to the community drives their passion and dedication to providing assistance and support to their fellow community members.

"In celebrating our 45th anniversary, we reflect on the journey that has brought us here and reaffirm our commitment to serving the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands," said Kristen Hodge, Director, FEMA USVI Recovery Office. "Our members live and breathe the spirit of service, and we are honored to be part of these communities."

To mark this milestone, FEMA is highlighting some of its significant accomplishments in the Virgin Islands since hurricanes Irma and Maria. These include:

- **Infrastructure Hardening:** In collaborating with territorial organizations, FEMA has worked tirelessly with its partners in the territory on hurricane recovery projects that will repair and rebuild critical infrastructure, ensuring the resilience of the U.S. Virgin Islands against future disasters. Several hazard mitigation projects that FEMA has funded include the development of microgrids on each island, stormwater management and roadway projects, as well as restoration of the Walter I.M. Hodge Pavilion.
  - The goal of the microgrids set to power St. Thomas and St. Croix are to provide a reliable and resilient energy solution for both islands. Engineered to seamlessly integrate with the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority



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grid, they'll feature solar photovoltaic plants and battery energy storage systems (BESS) in St. Croix, alongside a proposed wind farm in St. Thomas. These grids are pivotal in ushering in renewable energy initiatives, fortifying the existing electricity infrastructure for a sustainable, greener future.

Additionally, the St. John microgrid initiative will introduce a dependable solar-powered backup, enhancing resilience where it was previously lacking.

- Several road improvement projects in the territory have received funding to make them better at handling stormwater. The goal is to stop flooding on the roads and nearby land. This will make the roads stronger and last longer, reducing damage from bad weather and regular wear and tear. Some ways they'll do this include adding swales (channels for water), making culverts bigger to avoid flooding, and adding structures to prevent hills from collapsing.
- The Walter I.M. Hodge Pavilion, managed by the Virgin Islands Housing Authority, is being reconstructed. New wind retrofitted roofs, windows, and doors will mitigate damage from future storms. This project aims to ensure these buildings can withstand winds up to 168 miles per hour, as needed in the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- **Support for Individuals and Businesses:** Through various assistance programs, FEMA has provided financial aid and support to individuals and businesses, aiding in their recovery and rebuilding efforts. FEMA's Public Assistance team secured funding for several electrical distribution hardening projects throughout the territory as well as projects to replace the above ground electrical systems with underground transmission and distribution in the same areas. These repairs will make the electrical transmission and distribution system more resilient, less susceptible to damage from natural disasters, and allow power to be restored at a significantly faster rate.
- **Investment in Resilience:** FEMA's Interagency Recovery Coordination, in partnership with federal agencies, supports the U.S. Virgin Islands' recovery efforts through collaborations like the Island Food Systems Summit held from February 19 to 21. The summit aimed to enhance the local food system by gathering expertise, sharing strategies, and fostering partnerships among government agencies, nonprofits, farmers, and businesses. The event focused on the theme "Relationships, Resources, and Resilience," emphasizing the importance of stakeholder relationships, natural resource management, and community resilience.



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- **Continuous Support:** Since 2019, FEMA's Virgin Islands Caribbean Area Office, has been dedicated to strengthening the USVI's preparedness for emergencies and disasters. The VI CAO continues to focus on working with the V.I. Territorial Emergency Management Agency to build the territory's capacity to strengthen its preparedness, response and initial recovery resources to bolster resilience.

The VI CAO has supported the territory during various crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, managing sargassum at St. Croix's desalination plant in 2022, and addressing lead and copper concerns in St. Croix's water system in 2023.

One notable achievement is the USVI Readiness Initiative, which involves federal and territorial agencies working together to improve disaster preparedness and response. Teamwork between multiple federal and territorial agencies has strengthened planning for response focus areas such as temporary emergency power and commodity distribution to ensure the territory's critical services stabilize faster after disasters. The 2024 Readiness Initiative's paramount event – the Capstone -- will feature workshops and exercises focused on preparedness, disaster response and initial recovery in May, in advance of hurricane season.

As FEMA celebrates 45 years of service, it reaffirms its commitment to its mission of supporting communities as well as ensuring their safety and well-being. The agency looks forward to continuing its partnership with the U.S. Virgin Islands and standing together during crises.

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*FEMA's mission is helping people before, during, and after disasters.*

