

STATEMENT  
OF  
JEFFREY BYARD  
ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR, OFFICE OF RESPONSE AND RECOVERY  
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY  
BEFORE  
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“Update on the Restoration of Puerto Rico’s Electric Infrastructure”

Submitted  
By

Federal Emergency Management Agency  
500 C Street, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20472

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## **Introduction**

Good afternoon, Chairman Harper, Ranking Member DeGette, and members of the Subcommittee. I am Jeff Byard, the Associate Administrator for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Office of Response and Recovery. On behalf of U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Nielsen and FEMA Administrator Long, thank you for the opportunity to discuss DHS and FEMA's ongoing efforts to assist with power restoration in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) following the devastating hurricanes in 2017. One of FEMA's top priorities has been—and continues to be—the restoration of electric power across both territories.

## **2017 Hurricane Season**

Last year's historic hurricane season was a true test of the Nation's ability to respond to and recover from multiple concurrent disasters. Three major hurricanes made landfall in the United States, which includes Puerto Rico and the USVI: Harvey, Irma, and Maria. The impacts of these events were substantial. Roughly 25.8 million people were affected by these three storms – roughly eight percent of the entire U.S. population.

In order to deliver disaster assistance to such a large and dispersed number of survivors, FEMA has worked in concert with our federal partner agencies; state, local, tribal, and territorial governments; and also non-governmental organizations (NGO) and the private sector to ensure a unity of effort that serves the needs of disaster survivors.

Unity of effort is required for disaster response and recovery on any scale. It has been—and will continue to be—especially crucial during response and recovery efforts following last year's hurricane season. All levels of government, non-profit organizations, private sector businesses, and even survivors—each drawing upon their unique skills and capabilities—will need to work together to meet the needs of disaster survivors.

## **Hurricanes Irma and Maria: Impacts and Federal Response**

### ***Hurricane Irma***

On September 6, 2017, the eye of Hurricane Irma made landfall in the British Virgin Islands, just north of the USVI, as a catastrophic Category 5 hurricane. Extreme winds and heavy rainfall ravaged the USVI, particularly St. Thomas and St. John. Hurricane Irma then continued on its path of destruction, passing just north of Puerto Rico on September 7—still as a Category 5 storm—leaving more than one million customers without power.

President Trump approved an emergency declaration for the USVI on September 5 prior to Hurricane Irma's landfall, followed by a major disaster declaration on September 7. This major disaster declaration made federal funding available to affected individuals on the islands of St. John and St. Thomas through FEMA's Individual Assistance Program. It also made federal funding available to territorial and eligible local governments, and certain non-profit organizations, through FEMA's Public Assistance Program. Funding under the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program was made available for the entire territory.

Following an emergency declaration on September 5, President Trump approved a major disaster declaration for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico on September 10, making Individual Assistance funding available to affected individuals in the municipalities of Culebra and Vieques. Public Assistance funding was also made available to the Commonwealth, eligible local governments, and certain private nonprofit organizations. Hazard Mitigation funding was made available throughout the Commonwealth. This disaster declaration was later amended to expand both Individual and Public Assistance to additional municipalities.

FEMA's National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) was activated to a Level I (the highest level of activation, with all Emergency Support Functions activated) prior to Hurricane Irma's impacts on the USVI and Puerto Rico. Federal personnel were also pre-positioned in the USVI and Puerto Rico to coordinate with territorial and municipal officials. This included FEMA staff that operate out of the Caribbean Area Division office located in San Juan, regional personnel from FEMA's Region II (which has responsibility for both Puerto Rico and the USVI), as well as Incident Management Assistance Teams (IMATs) that were deployed to both territories. Additional federal resources and personnel were strategically staged just outside of the storm's path, including ships from the U.S. Coast Guard and the Department of Defense. Once the storm had passed, these additional federal resources and personnel flowed into the territories as part of a unified federal response.

Within days of Irma's impact, more than 582,000 shelf-stable meals, 380,000 liters of water, and other life-saving commodities (cots, baby formula, temporary roofing materials, and other necessities) were delivered to the USVI National Guard for distribution at local Points of Distribution in St. John and St. Thomas. These items were also distributed to shelters operated by the American Red Cross and other recovery partners. More than 3,600 liters of water and other commodities were also transferred to Puerto Rico at the request of the Commonwealth, supplementing the resources already staged in FEMA's distribution center on the island. In addition, Disaster Survivor Assistance Teams were quickly on the ground in both the USVI and Puerto Rico to help assess needs of affected communities.

### ***Hurricane Maria***

On September 19—only two weeks after Hurricane Irma impacted the USVI and Puerto Rico—the eye of Hurricane Maria passed just south of the USVI on its way to making landfall in Puerto Rico on September 20. St. Croix and Puerto Rico were devastated by Hurricane Maria's powerful winds and heavy rainfall, which severely damaged communications and power grids, destroyed homes, and downed trees across both islands. In its wake, Hurricane Maria—the fifth-strongest storm ever to impact the United States and territories, and the strongest storm to strike Puerto Rico in nearly a century—left nearly all of Puerto Rico's 1.5 million electricity customers without power or communications.

President Trump approved major disaster declarations for both the USVI and Puerto Rico on September 20, making FEMA's Individual Assistance, Public Assistance, and Hazard Mitigation Grant Programs available for both territories. The federal government also immediately launched a massive and united response and recovery operation.

One day after Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico, there were already more than 3,500 federal staff on the ground in Puerto Rico and the USVI supporting response and recovery operations. These included a National Incident Management Assistance Team (N-IMAT) and FEMA Urban Search & Rescue (US&R) taskforces that were prepositioned to operate immediately following the storm's landfall. By September 29, there were more than 10,000 federal staff (including more than 800 FEMA personnel) on the ground in Puerto Rico and the USVI, working around the clock with territorial and local officials to stabilize the situation. To date, FEMA has delivered more than \$1 billion in food and water to Puerto Rico and the USVI in support of disaster survivors.

## **Hurricanes Irma and Maria: Power Restoration Efforts in Puerto Rico and the USVI**

### ***Temporary Power***

Power restoration in Puerto Rico and the USVI has been a top priority for FEMA following Irma and Maria. On September 30, 2017, FEMA mission assigned the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to provide temporary power to both territories. In furtherance of the temporary power mission, USACE installed over 1,900 emergency generators in Puerto Rico and 180 emergency generators in USVI. The Hurricane Maria temporary power mission is the largest one in the agency's history.

FEMA, along with its federal and NGO partners, have also worked closely with the respective Governors and agencies in the USVI and PR to ensure that temporary power support continues to be prioritized for critical facilities such as hospitals, police and fire stations, communications facilities, and water treatment plants.

### ***Emergency Power Grid Repairs***

In order to provide a stable power solution for survivors, FEMA has also supported restoration of the electrical power grid on Puerto Rico and the USVI. On September 30, FEMA issued a mission assignment to USACE to assist the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority (PREPA) on emergency repairs across the island. Specifically, USACE was tasked to help restore temporary power and "lead planning, coordination and integration efforts in preparation to execute electrical power grid restoration in Puerto Rico due to impacts caused by Hurricane Maria" and to "develop and execute applicable temporary repairs to the electrical grid to allow interim restoration of system segments as directed by FEMA until the full electrical grid restoration can be implemented."

As assigned by FEMA, USACE leads the federal effort to repair the hurricane-damaged electrical power grid in support of the Government of Puerto Rico. USACE is partnering with the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority, the Department of Energy and FEMA to restore safe and reliable power to the people of Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico has 2,400 miles of transmission lines across the island and 30,000 miles of distribution lines with 300 sub-stations. As of April 9, PREPA reports more than 96 percent or approximately 1.41 of the 1.47 million pre-storm customers who are able to receive electric power have their service restored.

In the USVI, FEMA has supported the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (VIWAPA) in its efforts to restore the power grid. By mid-November, expedited FEMA grants totaling more than \$75 million allowed VIWAPA to begin the emergency repair of transmission and distribution lines in St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John. The power authority shipped in power lines and poles, as well as 500 linemen from across the United States, resulting in a ten-fold increase in local capacity compared to before the hurricanes. Power was restored to over 90 percent of customers in the USVI by the end of December. As of March 9, power has been restored to 100 percent of customers.

In addition to USACE, FEMA has also mission assigned the Department of Energy (DOE) to assist with power grid restoration. DOE is providing subject matter expertise and technical assistance in support of power grid damage assessments and power restoration efforts in both Puerto Rico and the USVI, in coordination with USACE. The Department of Energy is also working to identify various options for the long-term restoration and resilience of Puerto Rico's electric grid.

## **The Road to Recovery: Delivering FEMA's Infrastructure Assistance Programs**

### ***Public Assistance in Support of Power Restoration***

PREPA and VIWAPA are ultimately responsible for the permanent repair of power generation, transmission, and distribution infrastructure. However, FEMA and its federal partners (including USACE and DOE) are closely supporting their efforts.

FEMA is primarily supporting the restoration of the Puerto Rico and USVI power grids through its Public Assistance program. As of April 5, FEMA has approved \$1.4 billion in Public Assistance emergency work for Puerto Rico and nearly \$450 million for the USVI. These amounts include funding for power restoration efforts in both territories.

FEMA is also working with Puerto Rico and the USVI on the development and execution of Public Assistance permanent work projects, which will include the restoration of utilities—including power. As of February 14, \$245 million dollars in federal assistance has been obligated for public works related to electrical utilities in Puerto Rico, and over \$180 million in the USVI.

On February 9, the President signed into law the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018. Under authorities given to FEMA in this law, FEMA may provide Public Assistance funding for critical services to replace or restore the function of a facility or system to industry standards without regard to their pre-disaster condition. The law further allows FEMA to provide assistance for critical services to replace or restore components of the facility or system that are not damaged by the disaster when it is necessary to fully effectuate the replacement or restoration of disaster-damaged components to restore the function of the facility or system to industry standards.

FEMA will continue to work with our partners to effectively integrate and implement all of our disaster assistance programs in support of power restoration efforts in Puerto Rico and the USVI

to include working with the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development on its authority under the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 to provide up to \$2 billion in funding for enhanced or improved electrical power systems.

### ***Public Assistance Alternative Procedures in Puerto Rico***

On October 30, 2017, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico elected to utilize Public Assistance Alternative Procedures for all large project Public Assistance funding for permanent work pursuant to section 428 of the Stafford Act. Under authorities granted to FEMA in the Sandy Recovery Improvement Act (SRIA), Public Assistance Alternative Procedures allow applicants to request and obtain funding based on certified cost estimates to repair, restore, or replace a damaged facility. Once FEMA and the applicant agree on the damage assessment, scope of work, and estimated costs, a Public Assistance grant can be obligated.

The goals of the Public Assistance Alternative Procedures are to reduce costs, increase flexibility in the administration of assistance, expedite the delivery of assistance, and provide financial incentives for the timely and cost-effective completion of Public Assistance projects. The alternative procedures also allow Public Assistance applicants to retain funding when there are cost underruns and utilize those funds for eligible additional hazard mitigation measures and for activities that improve future Public Assistance program permanent work operations.

Pursuant to the Governor's decision, FEMA will administer Public Assistance permanent work projects in Puerto Rico using the Alternative Procedures. As a condition of receiving funding under these procedures, the President required that the Commonwealth establish a grant oversight authority supported by third-party experts to perform the responsibilities of the grant recipient. On October 23, 2017, the Governor of Puerto Rico ordered the creation of the Central Recovery and Reconstruction Office (CRRO) of Puerto Rico. The CRRO will provide the required grant oversight authority. FEMA will also require that any cost estimate over \$5 million be reviewed by a third-party independent expert.

### ***Long-Term Recovery***

In order to meet the long-term recovery needs of Puerto Rico and the USVI, FEMA has fully implemented the structure and functions of the National Disaster Recovery Framework (NDRF) to ensure that federal recovery efforts remain coordinated and effective across all six Recovery Support Functions (RSFs). In particular, FEMA has leveraged the NDRF and the Recovery Support Function Leadership group to support the Infrastructure Systems RSF, which is led by USACE. In Puerto Rico, the Infrastructure Systems RSF has been split into five sectors—including a separate sector for energy—in order to address the magnitude of damage across multiple infrastructure systems.

Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinators (FDRCs) have been named for both Puerto Rico and USVI. These FDRCs will work closely with the governments of the USVI and Puerto Rico to facilitate disaster recovery coordination and collaboration among the territories, federal and municipal governments, private sector entities, and voluntary, faith-based, and other NGOs.

## **Conclusion**

Within one month's time, FEMA was responding to three major hurricanes, two of which hit the USVI and Puerto Rico within two weeks. By the end of 2017, FEMA registered more than 4.7 million survivors for individual assistance —more registrations than for Hurricanes Rita, Wilma, Katrina, and Sandy combined. The Agency had also distributed more than \$2 billion in individual assistance to survivors, processed 133,000 flood insurance claims, and paid out more than \$6.3 billion to policyholders across the country.

In addition to providing financial support, FEMA also deployed thousands of our employees, mission assigned nearly 14,000 staff and service members from various offices of the Department of Defense, and—for the first time ever—the Secretary of Homeland Security extended the DHS Surge Capacity Force to all federal agencies in order to deploy an additional 3,800 employees from across 36 federal departments and agencies. We have also welcomed hundreds of new FEMA Local Hire and Reservist employees to assist with recovery efforts. I cannot recall a more challenging hurricane season, nor a more impressive whole community response, in my history of emergency management.

The road to recovery will be a long one, but FEMA will continue to work with its Federal, state, territorial and local partners, as well as Congress, throughout the recovery process. Though the power grids in both Puerto Rico and USVI were significantly damaged, we continue to see progress in power restoration every day. We will also be in the impacted communities for as long as we are needed.

I am grateful for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss this important mission, and I am happy to respond to any questions the Subcommittee may have at this time. Thank you.