

WSVI-WZVI-Quarterly Issues and Problems Report
From April 1, 2019-June 30, 2019

WSVI TV remains in silent status. On September 21, 2018 WZVI returned to the air in a testing mode at low power. It remains our goal to return to the air as soon as possible. To serve the public during this time Alpha Broadcasting attempted to maintain a 24/7 live stream of its programming incorporating many of its program elements. This report is prepared for continuity for the public file system and reflects some of the issues and concerns guiding our online and streaming coverage of our community.

Mental Health

Channel 8's reporting in its news programs extensive debate about the crisis in mental health care in the Virgin Islands post the hurricane disasters. Channel 8 TV carried the conferences by the Governor and the Territorial Legislature on ways to increase funding for mental health.

Spurred by federal interventions following the September 2017 hurricanes, a cadre of V.I. government officials, medical professionals, and advocates have been quietly working in the background for the past year and a half, and their efforts are about to pay off in the form of a major – albeit somewhat temporary – upgrade to staff.

Before the storms hit, the V.I. Health Department operated four clinics throughout the territory, providing such outpatient services as counseling, group sessions and medication monitoring. There was only one place – the Eldra Schulerbrandt facility on St. Thomas – for long-term residential care housing 32 people from all three islands, and all experts agreed it was not nearly enough.

There was no place for patients who committed criminal offenses, including those judged not guilty by reason of insanity, except jail on St. Thomas or prison on St. Croix, neither of which has a forensic unit, a section devoted to housing and caring for such inmates. Consequently, the Bureau of Corrections has been in violation of federal mandates for decades.

The local government was paying millions of dollars a year to house patients off-island, dividing up the costs among three departments depending on the individuals: troubled adolescents fell under Human Services, severe-needs inmates were covered by BOC and other adult patients were the responsibility of the Health Department.

The hurricanes rendered both hospitals, the Schulerbrandt facility and the outpatient clinic on St. Thomas unusable for many months. Many health professionals left the territory, exacerbating an already short supply. Meanwhile, the need increased, as residents tried to cope with the stress of the hurricanes and the aftermath of protracted recovery.

Crime in the Virgin Islands

Channel 8 has been working with the Virgin Islands Police Department on the Crime Wave sweeping the Virgin Islands. Weekly we broadcast promotional announcements for the anonymous tip service, Crime Stoppers USVI. A recent case brought an arrest that was able to resolve two homicide cases that took place in the territory, one two years ago, one in 2013.

Preparations being made for 2019 Hurricane Season

We gave extensive coverage to the Colorado State University hurricane researchers which are predicting a slightly below-average Atlantic hurricane season in 2019, citing the relatively high likelihood of a weak El Niño as a primary factor.

Tropical Atlantic sea surface temperatures are currently slightly below their long-term average values and are consequently considered an inhibiting factor for 2019 Atlantic hurricane activity as well.

A weak El Niño has recently developed in the tropical Pacific. CSU anticipates that these weak El Niño conditions are likely to persist through the peak of the Atlantic hurricane season. El Niño tends to increase upper-level westerly winds across the Caribbean into the tropical Atlantic, tearing apart hurricanes as they try to form.

The tropical Atlantic is slightly cooler than normal right now. Colder-than-normal sea surface temperatures in the tropical Atlantic provide less fuel for tropical cyclone formation and intensification. They are also associated with a more stable atmosphere as well as drier air, both of which suppress organized thunderstorm activity necessary for hurricane development.

Preparations for the 2019 Season

Channel 8 broadcast daily news programs regarding the legislative oversight hearings of preparations being made for the 2019 hurricane season. There is widespread skepticism as to the quality of the preparations.

Those involved in the territory's emergency response plan are assuring V.I. lawmakers that the Virgin Islands is better positioned now than it was in 2017.

Senators, however, are expressing doubts — particularly in regard to emergency shelters, which remain in short supply at a time when residents are still living in fragile homes and may need a shelter more than ever.

“We’re even more vulnerable than we were last year,” said Sen. Alicia Barnes, during a Senate hearing of the Government Operations, Consumer Affairs, Energy, Environment and Planning Committee, on Wednesday.

“A large shelter population and spectrum of mass care support is anticipated across the territory due to the number of homes that sustained damage and still have blue roofs or tarps,” she added, citing the after-action report compiled by the Federal Emergency Management Agency following hurricanes Irma and Maria.

Indeed, V.I. Human Services Deputy Commissioner Dale Donovan, who testified before the Senate, said the need for sheltering may increase this year since many are living in homes that were compromised by the 2017 hurricanes. Moreover, like the homes that were compromised, so too were the primary and secondary shelters that were traditionally used in the past.

The following shelters have been identified for the 2019 Atlantic hurricane season:

On St. Thomas, the V.I. Human Services Department’s Sugar Estate Head Start Center and the Lockhart Elementary School.

On St. Croix, the V.I. Human Services Department’s Frederiksted Head Start Center and St. Croix Educational Complex.

On Water Island, the Water Island Fire Station.

For St. John, Donovan said the department is currently working with government agencies and St. John community representatives to “identify the best sheltering options to satisfy their needs.”

Sen. Myron Jackson said the five shelters identified were “insufficient.”

Ongoing Hurricane Issues

The U.S. Virgin Islands suffered catastrophic damage after back-to-back blows from hurricanes Irma and Maria last fall. The storms damaged or destroyed about 18,500 homes and businesses on the three major islands — St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John — including multiple high-rise apartment buildings. The Virgin Islands has a population of about 103,000 people.

Even before the hurricanes, the Virgin Islands government was facing a dire financial crisis because of its stagnant economy. Those financial woes deepened after the storm because of the collapse of the tourism industry and shrinking tax revenue.

The territory has accumulated about \$1.9 billion in debt, and it maintains only two to four days of cash on hand, according to Lonnie Soury, spokesman for the Virgin Islands Public Financing Authority.

He noted that the Virgin Islands has received other aid from the federal government, including \$196 million to shore up its general fund and utilities, he said. In total, the

federal government has allocated more than \$2 billion for the territory's disaster recovery.

Tropical weather for 2017 impacts the Virgin Islands and WSVI-TV continues to provide local news even after its broadcast operations are impacted.

Two major Hurricanes struck the WSVI community during the quarter. The first was Hurricane Irma. Hurricane Irma was an extremely powerful and catastrophic Cape Verde-type hurricane, the strongest observed in the Atlantic since Wilma in 2005 in terms of maximum sustained winds. It was the first Category 5 hurricane to strike the Leeward Islands on record, followed by Hurricane Maria only two weeks later.

Hurricane Maria was regarded as the worst natural disaster on record in Dominica and caused a major humanitarian crisis in the Virgin Islands, as well as being the tenth-most intense Atlantic hurricane on record. The thirteenth named storm, seventh hurricane, fourth major hurricane, and the second Category 5 hurricane of the unusually active 2017 Atlantic hurricane season, Maria caused catastrophic damage across the Northeastern Caribbean, compounding recovery efforts in the already struck areas of the Leeward Islands, who were still recovering from hurricanes Irma and Jose just two weeks prior.

Originating from a tropical wave, Maria developed into a tropical storm on September 16 east of the Lesser Antilles. Remarkably favorable environmental conditions enabled the cyclone to undergo explosive intensification as it approached the Lesser Antilles. The system reached Category 5 strength on September 18 as it made landfall in Dominica, resulting in catastrophic damage across the entire island. Thereafter Maria reached its peak over the eastern Caribbean with maximum sustained winds of 175 mph making it the tenth-most intense Atlantic hurricane on record.

WSVI-TV AND WZVI-TV licensed to Alpha Broadcasting Corporation were impacted by two back-to-back Category 5 hurricanes in the third quarter of 2017. As a result of Hurricane Irma, WZVI-TV in St. Thomas were forced to cease operations as of September 8, 2017. WSVI-TV in St. Croix was able to remain operational throughout this storm but was knocked off the air with severe damage after the second hurricane on September 20, 2017. WSVI and WZVI both sought Special Temporary Authority to remain silent while the television stations are being rebuilt along with the necessary infrastructure to resume operations. Therefore for the period of this report, both stations remain off the air.

As of October 10, at least 88 people are known to have been killed by the hurricane: Including 1 in the United States Virgin Islands. Maria wrought catastrophic damage to the entirety of Dominica, which suffered an island-wide communication blackout.

While WSVI-TV's on air operations were impacted by the storms, WSVI-TV continued broadcasting weather updates and local news via the internet and its social media outlets and is planning on returning to cable TV in October as it works to restore operations. The programming has also including daily briefings by the local Government and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

WSVI TV began extensive hourly updates on the tropical weather conditions of the Caribbean in Q1 2017. These reports were carried in Spanish and English with open captions for the hearing impair and using Charts from the National Weather Service in San Juan Puerto Rico. These programs were also broadcast on WSVI-TV's Facebook page and regular updates on rip currents and tides as well as a Marine Forecast were reported.



CHANNEL 8 REMAINS OPERATIONAL ON INTERNET THROUGHOUT THE PERIOD.

Channel 8 maintained contact with its viewers in the Virgin Islands and outside the territory through social media and online via its website at www.wsvi.tv.