

**VIRGIN ISLANDS FIRE AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES
TESTIMONY**



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY, JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

35th LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

May 22, 2023

Presented By: Antonio Stevens, Assistant Director

Good afternoon, Honorable Chairman Kenneth L. Gittens, other members of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety, and the listening and viewing audience.

I am Antonio Stevens, Assistant Director of Fire for the Virgin Islands Fire and Emergency Medical Services (VIFEMS). I appear before you today to provide testimony on the readiness of this service and on other matters related to the 2023 hurricane season.

VIFEMS is a first responder agency with the capability of providing emergency response to all hazards, including fires, HAZMAT threats, natural and man-made disasters, entrapments, and medical emergencies. Currently, the agency operates and responds from 10 stations located throughout the territory and utilizes three other facilities as EMS bases.

With the strategic positioning of vehicles, equipment, and approximately 80 EMS providers at all levels of training, VIFEMS can have life-saving care on scene within 5-10 minutes. This was a previously unmet goal in the territory. However, as a singular, multi-discipline organization, the agency has worked to achieve and maintain these target response times.

As the upcoming hurricane season approaches, VIFEMS stands ready to support the territory.

In the event a storm watch or warning is issued, the agency will take the steps necessary to secure its facilities and equipment and ensure each station is adequately staffed.

Given its unique situation, additional measures will be taken on St. John. VIFEMS will position additional personnel on the island in the event there is no ferry service. Also, once the port is closed, the Star of Life ambulance boat will cease transporting patients and will be secured.

During hurricanes and tropical storms, the agency will maintain a safe work environment for its employees and will provide essential emergency services to the public as long as conditions do not endanger the responders' safety.

After a hurricane or tropical storm, agency personnel will be prepared to respond to emergencies and support recovery efforts.

“Serving with Purpose and Intent”

In the St. Thomas/St. John District, seven operational ambulances will be available to respond. The Star of Life ambulance boat or its replacement will also resume transporting patients from St. John to St. Thomas once the U.S. Coast Guard reopens the port.

To maintain effective and efficient operations, the agency will utilize information found on Emergency Locator Forms to check on personnel and arrange transportation to and from work if necessary. As in the past, arrangements may also be made with local ferry companies and the U.S. Coast Guard to transport employees relieving personnel assigned to St. John.

On St. Croix, ambulances will continue to operate from the Richmond Fire Station, the Frederiksted Fire Station, and the mid-island EMS base located in the Cottage area.

Both districts will have adequate medical supplies to sustain operations for three weeks and sufficient medications for at least 72-96 hours.

Firefighters in the Suppression Unit will resume emergency response operations and will assist with recovery-related activities such as debris removal.

This concludes my testimony today. The Chiefs and I await your questions.