

Hurricane Survivors Warned to Be Aware of Fraud and Scam Artists

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ST. CROIX, Virgin Islands – The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) are raising awareness that scam artists could be at work in the U.S. Virgin Islands, targeting survivors of hurricanes Irma and Maria who are seeking federal disaster assistance.

While disasters always bring out the best in most people, they can bring out the worst in some. Survivors should remain vigilant at all times to keep from falling victim to unscrupulous individuals.

Here are a few guidelines to protect yourself, or someone you care about, from disaster fraud:

- Federal workers will never contact you requesting that you provide your banking information or Social Security number in person, over the phone, by text or by email. If you are asked for this information, do not provide it. You are not dealing with legitimate recovery personnel.
- FEMA and other federal workers do not ask for, or accept, money. They will never charge applicants for disaster assistance, home inspections, or help filling out applications. Stay alert for false promises to speed up the insurance, disaster assistance, or building permit process – and do not give anyone money for such assistance.
- In person, always ask to see a FEMA employee's laminated photo ID badge. FEMA housing inspectors, Disaster Survivor Assistance and Disability Integration teams are currently working in impacted communities across the Virgin Islands. If they do not show you their badge when they approach you, ask to see it.
- FEMA and federal employees do not make copies of their badges to send to disaster survivors as proof of identity in advance of a visit. Do not expect to receive a photocopied badge from a legitimate FEMA employee. If you are sent one, know that you are dealing with an imposter.



- A FEMA shirt or jacket is not proof of identity. All FEMA representatives, including our contracted inspectors, will have the laminated photo ID.
- If you are approached via phone, email or in person by someone claiming to represent a charity helping disaster survivors, ask for the charity's exact name, street address, phone number, and web address, then contact the charity directly and confirm that the person asking for funds is an employee or volunteer. Always take steps to ensure the charity is legitimate before you give money, and request a receipt with the charity's name, street address, phone number and web address (if applicable). Legitimate nonprofit agencies routinely provide receipts for tax purposes.
- If you are unsure or uncomfortable with anyone you encounter claiming to be an emergency management official or charity worker, do not give out personal information, and report the incident.
- If you suspect fraud, contact the National Center for Disaster Fraud's hotline at **866-720-5721** or email the organization at disaster@leo.gov. Learn more about the National Center for Disaster Fraud at www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud.
- You may also report any suspicious activity to any one of the Virgin Islands police departments.

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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



FEMA

Page 2 of 3

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.



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Page 3 of 3