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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

USVI Tsunami Preparedness Week Set for March 13 – 19, 2016

VITEMA to Participate in Caribbean Region Tsunami Exercise on March 17

Tsunami Siren System to be Tested, School Evacuation Drills Planned

March 13 – 19, 2016, is *Tsunami Preparedness Week* in the US Virgin Islands to raise awareness about the Territory's vulnerability and risk for a tsunami event and to encourage the community to be prepared.

In observation of USVI Tsunami Preparedness Week, on Thursday, March 17th, the Territory will join several Caribbean countries in a regional tsunami response exercise titled "CARIBE WAVE 16." The exercise is designed to evaluate local tsunami response plans, increase tsunami preparedness, and improve coordination throughout the region.

CARIBE WAVE 16 will simulate an 8.4 magnitude earthquake off the Caribbean coast of Venezuela that generates a tsunami. This event will trigger widespread Tsunami Warning and Watch situation throughout the Caribbean which requires implementation of local tsunami response plans.

As part of the regional exercise, the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) will test 22 sirens that are part of the tsunami warning siren system. Sirens on St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John are set to activate at approximately 10:15 a.m. on Thursday, March 17th. Anyone standing outdoors and within a mile of a siren may hear the alert tone and voice message.

The Agency's 911 Emergency Communications Centers will also practice its protocols for notifying key government officials. VITEMA has also partnered other government departments and agencies organizations to hold events during Tsunami Preparedness Week including the Legislature of the Virgin Islands and the Department of Education. Evacuation drills will be held

at Ulla Muller Elementary School on St. Thomas and Juanita Gardine Elementary School on St. Croix.

“There are numerous businesses, government offices and several schools within two miles of the coastline, which puts them at high risk,” said VITEMA Director Mona Barnes. “If a tsunami originates within the Virgin Islands, those along the coastline will have only minutes to move to higher ground and out of harm’s way. So it is critical that everyone consistently exercises evacuating to a safe zone. That way the route becomes familiar and there’s no guessing in a real event.”

The exercise is sponsored by the UNESCO/IOC Intergovernmental Coordination Group for Tsunami and Other Coastal Hazards Warning System for the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions (ICG/CARIBE-EWS), the Caribbean Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), the Centro de Coordinación para la Prevención de los Desastres Naturales en América Central (CEPREDENAC), the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and by the U.S. National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program (NTHMP), a partnership of 29 states and territories and three federal agencies.

Tsunami Walk

Barnes is also encouraging coastal communities, organizations, groups and businesses to hold a *Tsunami Walk* during USVI Tsunami Preparedness Week. A *Tsunami Walk* entails walking from the tsunami hazard zone to a safe area. Safe areas begin two miles away from the coast or 80 feet above sea level. Visit www.VITEMA.gov/tsunami to view the VITEMA’s Tsunami Evacuation Maps that identify the tsunami zone, safe areas and assembly points.

“Anyone who lives or works within 2 (two) miles of the coastline should be aware that they are in a tsunami zone and make an effort to understand their surroundings and how to get to safety,” Barnes said.

Local businesses set to participate include the Divi Carina Bay Resort, the Palms at Pelican Cove Hotel, and Cottages at the Sea on St. Croix, and The Westin Resort & Villas at Chocolate Hole on St. John.

Participants are asked to register their activity at www.TsunamiZone.org .

For more information about the USVI Tsunami Readiness Program visit www.VITEMA.gov/tsunami.

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