

- Good morning. Good morning, Virgin Islands, and welcome to Ability Radio, you and your health. This show is a health literacy program funded by the VI Lottery Making a Difference program and it's broadcasting from the Da Vybe Radio station, 107.9 FM. My name is Amelia Headley LaMont, I'm the director of the Disability Rights Center and I am joined today by my co-host Iris Bermudez. Good morning, Iris.

- Good morning Amelia.

- How you doing?

- A little bit on the cold side but I'll be fine.

- Okay. We did get a good bit of rain today.

- Yes.

- Again, as usual, we go through our usual rules of engagement. We request that there be no use of names, no personal attacks, no unfounded allegations, product pitches, no profanity, and we don't give medical advice so we won't be able to respond to questions of that sort. The opinions expressed on the show are those of those of Amelia, Iris [ laughs ], and those of the guests. We are indeed a live call-in show and if you are so inclined, we encourage you to give us a call at 779-1079 or 713-1079. Well, 'tis the season.

- Yes, it is.

- This is a hurricane season and we have a very special guest this morning who will provide us with some very basic information on how to be prepared, what's available to us. Our guest this morning is Denise Lewis. She is the Deputy Director of Operations for VITEMA. Good morning, Ms. Lewis.

- Good morning, how are you?

- Well, fine, thank you. How are you?

- Great. I'm awesome.

- Okay, [ laughs ] that's good to hear. We have a lot of questions for VITEMA and, you know, years back I've since been educated I was always under the impression that VITEMA was the entity that would come and Rescue you when the waters were flooding your house and you needed to be airvac'd to some safe location. I later learned that that's not quite the goal or the scope or the mission of VITEMA. So today, I hope that you can educate us all [ laughs ].

- I definitely can do my best, too. So, VITEMA is not the fix-all, rescue-all. VITEMA is actually the coordinating agency for first responders and government agencies in the territory if there is a disaster, be it manmade or natural. And basically what we do is we ensure that whatever resources may be in a territory are distributed through the first responders to the people of the Virgin Islands, and if we don't have a resource in the Virgin Islands that's needed is to coordinate to get in here, whether it's through FEMA or other agencies on the mainland.

- And that's interesting because I, like Amelia for some times, thought that VITEMA was the national government [ laughs ]

- Nope.

- [ laughs ]

- And I guess people had that misconception because at one point we did fall under the National Guard.

- Oh, okay.

- We did, we did fall under the National Guard, so I guess that is where part of the misconception come in and we've been trying to do a lot of educating and letting people know VITEMA, and the keyword in this sentence is coordinate.

- Okay, and...

- VITEMA is the coordinating agency.

- And VITEMA stands for?

- The Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency.

- Okay. Got it.

- It's a local FEMA.

- Okay.

- Okay.

- That's basically what it is. It's your state-type FEMA office.

- Oh, okay. Okay.

- It's just your, you know, your local Emergency Management Agency. And FEMA is your Federal Emergency Management Agency.

- Okay. So basically you're in a planning stage for the whole year round in order to be prepared for if we have some kind of disaster...

- Yeah. Well, in the years gone by we used to plan just for hurricane, but I think we kind of have that down path.

- Okay.

- So nationally we turn to all hazards. So that is what we do year round. We plan for any and all hazards that may occur. Like I said, be it manmade or natural.

- Including earthquakes?

- Earthquakes, tsunami, major traffic accidents, oil spills, you name it...

- You do it?

- We do it, bomb threats. Yeah.

- Well, give me some examples of the planning. What kinds of, I'm just trying to visualize the planning part. What, what's a day in a life of a VITEMA, you know...

- Well...

- ...operation.

- ...we have four different components within agencies or divisions. We have planning and preparedness that does just that. They do training, they look at your plans, they make sure that our plans are good and a plan is a working document, so you have to constantly, constantly be looking at it and working it and making sure that, you know, the names are the same, the phone numbers no one has passed on and they're still your plan. And then we have admin and finance and that's the first division that takes care of us, make sure we get paid, pay our bills, human resources type stuff. And then we have grant management. And in the grant management, basically we have some grants that we received from FEMA and other homeland security grants and so forth and those organizations are, those individuals, I'm sorry, is responsible for our sub-grantees that we may have giving some grants to or some grants that we may be managing in-house. And then finally we have our operations division which I'm over and that includes our 911 senders on both islands and it also includes the emergency operation centers on all three islands. And basically your emergency operation center is where, if there is an emergency, like I said before, manmade or natural.

- Uh-hmm.

- We bring in representatives from most of the government agencies and some federal and then we have some volunteer organizations such as Rescue and American Red Cross, and we all sit in a room and makes decisions as to what is best for our community, making sure that we are saving lives and property.

- Okay. What does that whole process entail? Because you talked about different community organizations.

- You are referring to coming to the EOC?

- Yes.

- Okay. So what happens is that we ask each government agency or department to assign maybe two, a minimum of two, depending on the site of the, size of the agency, possibly three or more individuals.

- Okay.

- And they have to go through some basic training, know the lingo, know, there is this that caught, this procedure that we call NIMS, that the federal government calls NIMS and they have to know how to work that in order to be in the EOC.

- Now, what's a NIMS? What does that [ inaudible ]

- NIMS is a National Incident Management System. Okay?

- Uh-hmm.

- And it's basically, if someone from the Virgin Islands should be able to step into Florida's EOC...

- Emergency operation center...

- Center.

- Uh-huh.

- And go to work because we all receive the same training. Basic same training. Now we understand that they not, they may not know the players.

- Right.

- But the system, we all know the same system.

- Okay.

- Okay?

- Interesting.

- Okay. That you [ inaudible ] this is a lot to chew on. So, we will return after this brief pause. We're back. You're listening to Ability Radio, You and Your Health. This is your morning to discuss hurricane preparedness, disaster preparedness. Our special guest this morning is Denise Lewis. She is the Deputy Director of operations for VITEMA. And again, VITEMA stands for?

- The Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency.

- Okay.

- It's your local FEMA.

- Okay.

- Good, good.

- Quick question, because I wanna make sure I don't miss it, I know, Iris, you have a question coming. You refer to VITEMA as the local FEMA, is it also an agency where you, an individual who has a loss would submit an application?

- It depends on if a disaster is declared.

- Okay.

- Oh.

- We have to have declaration.

- Okay.

- Right, and that's usually by the Governor...

- The Governor and then up to the President...

- To the President.

- ...of the United States.

- Okay.

- Okay. Denise, since we've already been experiencing tropical waves, depressions, and we've heard about tropical storms going up, you know, to North Carolina, whatever.

- Uh-hmm.

- Could you please explain what they are so that we can get a really good understanding of this? Because I remember years back with Hugo, you know, they were announcing it was a hurricane and the category.

- Uh-hmm.

- And I said, oh, well okay. It's not gonna be so bad because I didn't know what to expect.

- Oh, wow. Yeah.

-And that was a serious problem because what we got was what, was what I didn't expect [ laughs ]

- I don't think any of us expected it, you're right.

- ...none of those things and I lost my roof and all that stuff, so I think we need to make sure that the public understands what each of these phenomena are so that we can maybe hopefully become a little better prepared.

- Okay. So, a tropical depression is, and I'm gonna put in layman's terms because we can all go in the internet look up the definitions and so forth. But a tropical depression is we're basically, we're going to be expecting a lot of rainfall.

- That's it?

- Some lights winds. Uh-hmm. Some gushes here and there.

- Uh-hmm.

- A tropical storm now is when that wind is picking up and it's a little bit more organized and the wind is higher and you have a higher wind gust.

- Uh-hmm.

- Okay?

- Uh-hmm.

- And then we move on to hurricanes. And as we know, hurricanes comes in a lot of different categories. So, you can have a tropical storm up to, well, let's start with the depression. A depression is anything less than 38 miles per hour when we're talking about speed, wind [ inaudible ] a tropical storm is between 39 and 73 miles per hour. Then you go into your hurricane that we, none of us really likes and you have categories one through five. And category one being the lowest is forty, excuse me, seventy-four to ninety-five miles per hour. A category two is ninety-five to a hundred and ten miles per hour. Three is a hundred and eleven to a hundred and twenty-nine miles per hour. And we're not gonna even discuss any of the others. God is good. We don't worry about those.

- [ laughs ]

- [ laughs ]

- Okay?

- Those are the [ inaudible ]

- Because what we always say at VITEMA is be prepared.

- Yeah.

- Have a plan, have your kit. We, no one can determine what's gonna happen but how you get through it is how prepared you are and how much planning you have had. Okay? That's how, that, I mean, those are the most important things, I mean, there's some, there's just some stuff that's beyond our control.

- Right.

- So we constantly is preach, we constantly preach, have a plan and exercise your plan. Don't just determine, "Okay. If God forbid my roof go, I go in here." How you gonna get there?

- In the middle of the storm.

- Have you told a person you come in there?

- Uh-hmm.

- Uh-hmm.

- Do you understand? Have you had a discussion with your neighbors? Because you know, if something like that happens in the middle of the night or even just in the middle of the storm, you can't get to a shelter.

- Right.

- Right.

- Have you had a discussion with your neighbor that, you know, "Hey, if something happens, you can come here? Some, if something happens to you, you can come here and if something happens to me, can I come there?" You know, have that, have that discussion.

- And you know, you just hit on something that I keep hearing over and over, get yourself to a shelter, but you're supposed to get there before the storm arrives, no?

- Exactly.

- Don't wait.

- When we start telling you the shelters are open and you need to report to the shelter, we're asking you and please go to the shelters. We have seen over the last two years or so in the mainland, a lot of first responders has lost their lives...

- Yeah.

- Uh-hmm.

- ...because they're trying to go out in the middle of these disasters, whether it's flooding, and I remember an incident where the sheriff was going in a, in a, in a boat to pick up, get some people, and the river just came over and washed them away and the individuals are alive. We all have family members as first responders because we are a very small community.

- Right.

- Okay. So, please, if we said the shelters are open and you know, because we know if our house can withstand the storm or not, whether it's flooding or wind, we, you know, you know, go to a shelter. If you don't wanna go to the shelter then you make some arrangement when, arrangements with a friend or a family member to come and be with them. And don't show up to the people in their house empty-handed. Plan in advance, take some water, some juice, and have it over there in advance.

- Hurricane season started from June.

- Right.

- Uh-hmm.

- We've been blessed so far.

- Okay.

- If you know that your house can't withstand flooding or wind, and you've made arrangements with cousin Mary to come to her house because cousin Mary have a generator and, you know, take some food over to cousin Mary house from May.

- I'm [ inaudible ]

- Have it there so that when you come it's not inconvenient. Because remember, it's already an inconvenience, you're taking up people personal space, you're using the electricity even though it may be through a generator, their water, and so forth, just be considerate and take some stuff over there so that when you come it won't be like an extra burden to that individual.

- Yeah, that's a good idea. People don't think that, you know, before.

- No. But that's all part of planning and being prepared.

- Hmm.

- What are some typical things you would put in a hurricane or any kind of disaster kit?

- Okay. So in your emergency kit, and we ask that you have more than one kit. You should have a kit to work.

- Oh, my goodness.

- Oh.

- And so what is that?

- And you should have a kit in your car. Why? Remember now, we're planning for all hazards. Yes, this is hurricane season and I came here to talk about hurricanes, but I need to educate the public on all hazards. So, if there's an earthquake and you have to work, what happens? Your kit at home?

- Right.

- You have nothing.

- I have nothing, yeah.

- Okay. So some of the basics things that we ask that you place in your kit is your prescription medication, glasses, and always have an extra copy of your prescription. Okay? If something happens to the pharmacy that you're used to dealing with, you'll have a copy of your prescription, you can take it to another pharmacy. If you have a baby, you make sure you have formula and diapers, and we ask that we take care our pets, you gotta have pet food and some extra water for your pet. Keep your important family documents, you know, they always say make copies, put them in a Ziploc bag, and so forth. We're all into computers, so I say scan them in and email them to yourself. You can open your email from anywhere.

- It's a good idea.

- If a disaster is declared and you lose your bag with those copies in there, they're no good to you.

- Yeah.

- But if they're open in a FEMA disaster area and they have computers there, you can just go on, open your email, print them, and you're ready to go, one less stress. Okay? So email them to yourself. Make sure you have cash on hand. We don't know if the banks are gonna be opened or the ATM machines are working. Okay? Depending on a situation, you know, you can have a sleeping bag or some type of blanket or so forth. Have a change of clothing. You know, in some cultures, they don't sleep in pajamas, they sleep in full, they sleep fully clothed with shoes on in case there's a disaster, they're ready to move.

- Uh-hmm.

- They're ready to go, yeah.

- Something to think about. I don't know if I can do that. Something to think about.

- [ laughs ]

- In your house you make sure that you have a fire extinguisher...

- Yeah.

- ...you have matches in a waterproof container, you have feminine supplies and personal hygiene...

- Uh-hmm.

- ...and you have your paper goods for eating, paper plates, paper cups, utensils, and so forth. Always have a piece of paper or notebook and pad. And for the children, make sure you have some games, something to keep them occupied so that they can really not get on your nerves. So now, let's get down to the most important stuff that you should have in your kit, water.

- Water.

- One gallon per person per day, for at least five days.

- Uh-hmm.

- Do not buy the gallon bottles. Water is heavy.

- Right.

- Uh-hmm.

- If you gotta move with that and it's heavy, you gonna start pulling out bottles of waters, right?

- Yeah.

- But if you have the 16 ounces, right? It's easier to pull out one or two of those than pulling out a whole gallon. Okay? So don't buy the gallon bottles. Food, again, a five-day supply, a battery operated radio, or NOAA Radio, flashlight with extra batteries, first aid kit, a whistle, I'm gonna tell you what's with the whistle. I'll tell what's with the whistle. A dust mask, tell you about that, and some moist baby wipes, garbage bags, plastic ties, a wrench, turn off your gas outside. For those who like canned food and you have canned food in your kit, what do you need?

- A can opener.



- A can opener.

- [ laugh ]

- [ laugh ]

- And of course your hurricane tracking map if it's for, you know, during hurricane. So, the whistle. There's something about when you're screaming, the wind is carrying your voice, and the first responders may not get the direct location where you're at, but with the whistle, they can. And if you've been screaming for help for a while your voice is gonna go but if you're blowing that whistle...

- They're gonna [ inaudible ]

- ...so you have a whistle in your kit.

- Okay.

- That's interesting.

- So, those are some of the things that you need to have in your emergency kits.

- All right. Well, food for thought.

- I'll tell you. Interesting.

- We'll be back after this break. We're back. You're listening to Ability Radio, You and Your Health. And this morning our special guest is Denise Lewis. She is the Deputy Director of Operations for VITEMA, Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency. I got it.

- You got it. [ laughs ]

- [ laughs ]

- Okay. During the break we talked about a couple of things that was on this list of items you should have at the ready for your kit. And Denise, if we can go back to, one of the things you've mentioned was a NOAA Radio.

- Uh-hmm.

- Can you tell us a little bit more about that?

- So it's actually called a NOAA Weather Radio. And what happens, first of all, you can get it from RadioShack and from American Red Cross. Those are the two places, they might have other places but those are the two places I'm aware of.

- Okay.

- And you plug in the radio and it's quiet. You can't hear the regular radio stations, it's not that kind of radio. But if there's a disaster having to do with weather, it will have a long tone, beep. And then a message will come on, telling you what the emergency is. The emergency can be hurricane, tropical storms, earthquake, tsunamis, and so forth. So it's something that everyone should have in their home and they're fairly inexpensive, you can get them online also.

- N-O-A, right?

- N-O-A-A.

- N-O-A-A.

- Weather Radio.

- Got you. And that stands for weather...

- And they're battery operated or you can, there are some that you can hand crank because it's just to what extreme you want.

- Right. Oh, boy. Okay. And we also, remember we, before the break we talked about masks.

- Dust masks.

- Having a mask, dust mask. Why is that even important?

- Because remember, all hazards. So, if there's an earthquake and the earth is disturbed, you have all kind of stuff in the air, same thing with the hurricane if you remember after Hugo, how brown it was and, you know, there was this, the haze over it.

- Right.

- And the dust mask is good for everyone, but in particular those that has respiratory problems for sure should be having the dust mask.

- Yeah. And then you can buy those anywhere because I've seen them all over the place.

- Yeah, you can buy those anywhere. And when I go out and I do presentations, I, you know, we have, when VITEMA do explore sometime, we give away a kit for a family of four for three days, you know, kit costs us almost \$200 and everybody likes the kit, it's already, everything is already there and they're for them. And I'm like, "Well, you don't have to do it like that." There's a real inexpensive way to do a kit, because we normally come from large families. So, if we work it together, you know, someone goes on and buy a pack of assorted batteries. Somebody goes, excuse me, Band-Aid, wow. Assorted Band-Aids. You go out and you get the alcohol wipes. You get, go out and get the painkillers that you can buy at the gas stations and some other first aid stuff and you break it up, and you put them in small, in the Ziploc bags, and you distribute it. You don't have to go out and buy a 50-dollar first aid kit for one person, you can spend that same \$50 and end up with about four first aid kits, okay? Because remember, you're not trying to do life-saving measures, you're doing basic first aid. Okay? Basic first aid, you know, and one thing I wanna stress, we have this habit of, when there is no electricity, you know, we have this obsession with taking bath, especially to the young people. Yeah. They have, yes, they do, I said it. You have this obsession with taking a bath. So, we open up the cistern covers.

- And we start dumping.

- And we try, dip in water. That's a very dangerous situation because when mommy and daddy is home, mommy and daddy dip in the water, you know, they're paying attention, everything good, mommy and daddy go to take care whatever needs to be taken care of, the child was sleeping late, mommy and daddy let the child sleep late. Child get up, child want to take a bath, mommy and daddy didn't leave no extra water, so they take off the collar, and dry to dip. With the laziness, we're not wanna dip in our half, or half of pail of water, we wanna full the five-gallon and try to pour, and that weight of that water while you're bending over a cistern there's always a possibility that you slip and fall into that cistern. That's a very, very dangerous situation. I do not promote taking off covers off the cisterns and dipping out water. Get some baby wipes, wipe the most essential parts, and keep it moving.

- Right. That's good advice, Denise, thank you.

- Keep it moving. It not, it's not worth the risk. And almost everyone, including me and you, Iris can fall through those cistern covers.

- Exactly. Exactly.

- Me too. [ laugh ]

- Well, you're smaller than us. That's why I used Iris and I. We got [ inaudible ] on us. So, even Iris can go through [ laugh ] even Iris can go through those cistern covers. So, you gotta be very, very careful.

- Yeah. It's scary.

- Yeah, it is.

- Absolutely scary.

- It is, and I always tell people that, don't take off your cistern covers. It's not that important.

- No, that's true though, what you said because I remember with Hugo, I did that, but only to get water in small buckets to fill the tubs and then to wash clothes, you know, by hand, like we used to do in the old days. [ laugh ]

- Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

- Well, that's good advice.

- Okay. And then we also know, you know, if it's, and, you know, if they say, you know. don't talk about it, but if it's something extremely devastating, and we do not have bathroom facilities, I'm asking the community to not go behind trees and defecate, because you don't want someone else stepping in that. You find a private place, we get some black garbage bags, that's all part of your planning. Put it over a pail, do what you gotta do, tie it, and secure it for when they're picking up trash. You do not want a next epidemic problem because of feces.

- That's right.

- Right.

- That's right.

- Such as cholera, I believe.

- Well, it can be a number of things.

- Right, of course.

- It can be a number of things.

- Typhus.

- You don't, you don't, we don't want that.

- Right.

- I mean, and it, when I, when I do the presentation, they'd be like, "Eurgh, Ms. Lewis." Some be like, "Ooh, Ms. Lewis." Ooh, if we have us an epidemic.

- Absolutely.
- So, just you know, urinating is one thing, but, you know, let's think ahead so that we can make sure that we keep our community safe.
- Well, all this information has been so, to me, it's been so, you know, revealing because these are things that I wish I had known back then when Hugo hit.
- It's all a process.
- It's all a process.
- It's all a process. We learn. It's like other individuals' roofs got blown off during Hugo and then we tightened up our...
- Building codes.
- ...building codes. And now they're, they was strapped down and tied down, nailed down, whatever down, so that we should have way less roofs going if we have a hurricane of that magnitude because keep in mind, FEMA ain't giving that kind of money out ever again.
- Right.
- Look at all the disasters that's happening across the country.
- Yes.
- We may be one of the richest countries in the world but at some point...
- It's gonna stop.
- Exactly.
- It's gonna stop.
- So, you have to prepare in advance.
- Right.
- Take care of what you worked hard for.
- Right. Right.
- Okay.
- What's your sense in that? Maybe it's not a fair question of preparedness in the instance of earthquakes. I am a very happy subscriber to the i-ALERT and I am appalled [ laughs ] by the amount of notices that we're getting of, you know, these hiccups not too far from us.
- Okay. Let me give you a tip. Go back into VI-Alert, and change your settings for anything higher than a 4.5. You won't get those alerts.
- Okay.
- You get no other alerts for the 1. this and a 2. that.

- No, I adjusted my setting and I'm still appalled [ laugh ] may, but 4.5 might be a great threshold.

- Yeah.

- Yeah. I think I'm at four or something like that.

- So, whatever it other it is, after the four is one, yeah, that's a better one.

- Okay.

- There's a lot of earthquakes per day in the region and that may be a good thing because pressure is being released, it's not being built up. When it comes to preparing for an earthquake we're, the educating, that we're doing at this time is we're telling individuals if you feel a strong rumbling, wherever you at a shaking for a long period of time, that you're gonna drop and cover and you're gonna hold. You can hold on to a table, say we're in here when it happens, we'll get under this table, we'll hold on to the legs and the table is gonna move.

- Uh-hmm.

- So, we're gonna move the table, okay? Because the table is moving, don't lose it, you move with the table. So, we have a ceiling fan. That's one of the reasons why we'll be under the table, because if this ceiling fan drop, we don't want it to drop on us. So, you're trying to protect your back and your head by getting under something. Okay? Once, now, depending on how severe it is, once that happens, and it stops, you need to be heading for high ground, because now there's a possibility of a tsunami.

- A tsunami, uh-hmm.

- You need to be heading for higher ground. And you need to know where is that higher ground prior to the earthquake, because remember, we're not used to earthquakes. So, we go, oh, you ever wake up actually in the middle of the night. How bad is it gonna be, that's what everybody is going to be.

- [ laughs ]

- Okay? So, but if you know beforehand where you're supposed to go, after 30 seconds of being [ inaudible ] you're gonna kick in, and you gonna get to moving. And you need to have alternate sites, because you don't know what's gonna be stopping you from getting to your original site. And...

- Go ahead.

- And when you're planning, don't just think about home, we visit mommy, significant others, grandma, auntie, church, cousin, grocery store, churches, whenever you're at, make sure that visually, you're looking at where you can go. You, where you work, visually you're looking at where you can go. Okay? And have a plan for your family. If the earthquake happens in the middle of the night, and you can actually work the, or you can actually exercise the plan. You know, wake them up in the middle of the night, because then you gonna know which, because some children are better than others and I had my grandchildren, my daughter, my granddaughter was like, "We are ready." My grandson, we went out the house, thinking he behind of us. [ inaudible ] might pull off the covers.

- Oh, geez. [ laughs ]

- So, you know which child you have to pay more attention to, and the only way you're gonna know that is if you exercise your plan.

- We'll be back after the short break. Good morning, we're back. You're listening to Ability Radio, You and Your Health. One thing that I wanna make sure that I mention is that this show is recorded. So, if there's any information that you missed this morning, first of all, this show will be rebroadcasted on Sunday at

noon on 107.95. We also will have the show posted on our website which is [drcvi.org](http://drcvi.org). So, you will have many opportunities to learn from Denise Lewis, our guest today, she's the Director of Operations for VITEMA, the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency. All right, I'm so proud of myself.

- You got it.

- We've learned a lot and Denise, if you could tell us a little bit more about the i-ALERT. I'm not sure if how many people have subscribed to it, it is a phenomenal service, and what can you share with our audience today about its existence and why it may be useful to them.

- Okay. So, the i-ALERT gives you, it's an, a mechanism where we at VITEMA and other government agencies can give the community at large information that may be needed. For the most part people look at the i-ALERT for just weather type, the earthquakes, tropical storms, but if you notice, WAPA uses it if they're gonna have outages or if they're gonna have a disruption of water. The police department has the opportunity to use it if there's gonna be something major. Public Works uses it if there is going to have road closure there. So, it's not just for VITEMA, we share it with our other agency partners. And it's similar to, there's gonna be something else that's gonna come into the territory or is in the territory by the name of IPAWS. You ever gone, ever been in the United States and you've been in an area and all of a sudden, your phone start beeping, and when you look at the phone it tells you that a, it's a tornado watch and you never, that's never happened here.

- I've heard of it, but I've never experienced it.

- It's called IPAWS.

- Okay.

- So right now, it's similar to VI-Alert, the difference is you don't have to sign up for it. Because with VI-Alert, we will only capture in our residents. If you are a visitor, you didn't sign up for VI-Alert, and there was an earthquake and that's possible of a tsunami, you would never know unless you heard the sirens and all that good stuff.

- Uh-hmm.

- Okay. With IPAWS, you get, you're gonna get the information just like VI-Alert.

- Wow.

- But it automatically comes to your phone.

- So that's...

- You don't have to sign up for it.

- That's coming soon?

- Uh-hmm.

- Fantastic, on everyone's cell phone?

- Uh-hmm. And it will only be, it'll be for emergency.

- That's right.

- Roughly when will that be ready?

- Well, it should be, we did the testing of the system and it was approved, I mean, everything worked perfect like a week and a half ago.

- Uh-hmm.

- I'm not working on that project, so I'm not quite sure when it will be, but it's something that would be automatic. You won't have to do anything. You won't have to do anything. And IPAWS stands for the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System.

- Okay.

- Okay, and it's all over the country. I remember when I was in, um, I was in Virginia visiting my sister and we were, I was traveling up to Richmond to visit their state EOC, emergency operations center because I have a colleague that works there. And we going up the highway, you know, singing, having a good time, we had this little road trip. And then both of our phones started going off. I looked at it, it's like, tornado, something, something, something. I know nothing about no tornado. I get on the phone, I get on the phone and then I call the guy, and I said "Look, I get a signal telling me about a tornado and get, get to safety. What am I supposed to do?" And he told us what to do, get on the, you know, you know when you're driving, you get the overpass, underneath it. Get underneath there, you know, so that your car is not out in the open field.

- Wow. That's good.

- So the system is gonna be similar, it's gonna be just like that.

- That's great. Yeah, Denise, during the intermission we were talking about drop, cover, and hold for earthquakes.

- Uh-hmm.

- There's a tendency for people that when an earthquake strikes, they immediately run outside, could you talk to that because I remember living and working in Puerto Rico and it happened one night, like, at 2:00 in the morning, and I looked out the window and everybody was outside.

- Okay. So, if there's an earthquake and it's shaking and things are falling off the wall, your, the best thing for you to do is drop, cover, meaning get under something that can support some type of weight, like, a ceiling fan, a [ inaudible ] beam, some kind of weight, a sturdy table, if you have those high beds, something that you can get under and you hold on to it. Once the shaking is done, then you make an assessment of the situation. Now if you don't, if there's a lot of people and you don't have enough things, you can also stand up in the archway of a door.

- Uh-hmm.

- Once it is all over, then you make an assessment and a determination on whether you should be going out or not, because again, it's an earthquake. So the integrity of the building may have been, or the structure that you're in may have been compromised, understandably. But at least you're not running blindly while stuff is moving outside. Um, you don't know what gonna happen to the ground, you don't know what's gonna beat the trees, you have nothing out there to protect you. Wires, electrical wires.

- Uh-hmm.

- So you stay where you're at. Afterwards, you make the assessment on what to do.

- Okay, good. You certainly have been giving a lot of good advice, really appreciate this.

- Not a problem.

- Yeah.

- And that's what, that's one of our key rules at my team, is that to ensure that we're educating the public, making them, helping them become prepared, making sure that they know what they should do in the case of an emergency.

- And you've been very good about what you share and at the same time, sorry.

- That's okay.

- My voice is going. You have a fabulous, um, website. I went into it just to see for myself and I'm saying, "Well, this is pretty good. Good information."

- We try, we also have a Facebook page. They on Twitter, I don't do Twitter. They're on Twitter. So, yeah, we try, we try. We have to. It's all about saving lives and properties of the community, of the people of the Virgin Islands.

- Overall, how have you found the public's response to your outreach efforts?

- They're very responsive. I mean, they'll keep us busy with the outreach. They will keep us busy with the outreach. And, you know, those of us that do the outreach, I mean, we make sure, it depends on our audience. We cater to our audience. If it's, if it's young people, we're gonna talk like the young people.

- Good.

- The mature, educated, we go get to that level. And then, you know, with our seniors, we take the time.

- Good.

- And we explain to them and we allow them to ask questions and be patient with them. So, we have a good team that does outreach. So, thus far they've been very responsive. The requests continuously comes in and we try our best to meet all their requests.

- And the other agencies that work with you in the coordination of all this planning.

- Uh-hmm.

- They are also responsible for educating, aren't they?

- Yes, but their response, their responsibility is to educate on what they do.

- What they do, okay.

- Right, what they do.

- That's good.

- What they do, like, Red Cross, we'll educate on Red Cross.

- Okay.

- Department of Health, Department of Health, police, you know, they're more concerned about curfew and possibly making sure anything to do with law enforcement so everybody has their little area where we cover the broader spectrum of emergency management.



- Wow.

- I know a while back we talked about how does VITEMA work with residents with disabilities, say, residents who may have a hearing impairment or require sign language interpretation, how can we collaborate in that regard or how do, how do those pieces fit?

- Well, how those pieces will fit would be that if someone from your organization can sit, we have two levels, the ESCs, those are the individuals who actually come in to the EOC when there is a disaster, during the disaster and we do what we call "Work it," we work disaster. And then there's others where it would be maybe like your director, that will go to what we call the Emergency Management Council, where all the commissioners and directors and individuals on that level, they are the decision makers as to what the needs of the community is. So those are the two areas on which they can, you can participate.

- So, for example, and I'm just throwing this out with VITEMA have a person, say, from the housing authority, sit at the table or...

- Yes.

- [ inaudible ] in social services.

- Every government agency...

- Human services.

- Every government agency or department and, whether it be fully government or, wow, semi-autonomous. Wow. I was losing my chain of thought. Or semi-autonomous like WAPA or Port Authority, yes, they all sit to the table, then we have US Customs, we have Border Patrol. Just yesterday, we had a tabletop exercise, we were exercising with WAPA and the LPG with United States Coast Guard. So, yes, we have federal partners and our local agencies, then we have American Red Cross, we have St. Croix Rescue, we have quite a few people.

- Hospitals?

- Yeah, most definitely...

- Definitely.

- ...semi-autonomous, yeah, they're to the, to the table. Roy Schneider, Juan Louie, Frederiksted Health Center, Eastern Center in St. Thomas, Myra Keaton in St. John, yes, they're all to the table.

- Good.

- They're all to the table.

- This is, just,2 curiosity, how would Border Patrol come into something like this?

- If there's an incident at the airport.

- Okay.

- Interesting.

- Because remember, it's all hazards.

- Right, right.

- And a safe house on the US Border Patrol, yeah, and Homeland Security. So, if there's a plane crash, a terrorist attack, so they got to know, we got to know the players beforehand, we can't wait for something to happen to know the players. We got to know the players beforehand. We have to have a working relationship with them. They're my buddies. I love them.

- This is very enlightening. I mean, your agency's responsibilities are quite extensive.

- Yes.

- Yes, it is.

- Yes.

- It is, it is. It is.

- Wow.

- It is. We have a great responsibility when it comes to an emergency. We have to make sure that we are prepared to do what needs to be done for the people of the Virgin Islands. I mean, just look earlier this week, there was a threat in St. Thomas, the anthrax, there was a threat, we were involved with that. Um, bomb threats. We gotta be prepared, we gotta know what to do, we gotta make sure that people are trained to know what to do.

- Right, right.

- And I'll tell you, I for one am certainly glad you're here.

- That's right.

- We're a team.

- I feel more comfortable now.

- Well, that's good to know, that's good to know. We try, we do what we supposed to do and of course, we got some great partners, some excellent partners, including the National Guard.

- That's good to know, that's good to know.

- Yeah.

- Well, again, let me reiterate that if you missed anything this morning on this show, this show is recorded. It will be broadcasted again on Sunday at noon, on 107.9, The Vibe. And it's also going to be posted on our website, the Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands, [drcvi.org](http://drcvi.org). Denise, is there any parting words you'd like to share with the audience that perhaps we didn't touch upon this morning?

- Well, I think we touched upon on everything but some of the parting words I would like to have is with anything that's going to happen, we need to remain calm. Prior to that though, we need to always have a plan, we need to practice our plan, be prepared, don't wait until the last minute, you hear we're now having a tropical warning and you're going to buy up all the grocery store items, you should've done that already, and have your kit.

- Yes.

- And everything else will just fall in place.

- And I see you said a kit, not only home but to job, and in the car.
- Yeah, you got to be prepared.
- Oh my goodness.
- Okay?
- And I'll go buy three cases of water just to start.
- Thank you so much for listening. Thanks again to our guest, Denise Lewis.
- You're welcome.
- Great information.