

- Good morning, Virgin Islands. This is Archie Jennings here this morning with Ability Radio, You and Your Life, sponsored by the V.I. Lottery Commission. I, along with Amelia Headley LaMont and Iris Bermudez, with Disability Rights, come on this radio show to provide information and to educate about various resources within our community. And this morning, we have a distinguished guest, Ms. Mona Barnes. Good morning. Good morning.

- Good morning, sir, how are you doing? And good morning to the listening audience.

- Okay. And we do sponsor or allow call-ins. This is a very important show as we go Julian calendar in past June 1st, but also looking at the winds blowing from the motherland, we're reminded about which ways those winds are blowing and they're coming at us. So, we're right in the middle of the hurricane season. And you can call in at 779-1079 or 713-1079 as we go through the show. And if you have questions regarding disaster preparedness, getting ready for hurricane season, we all need to be prepared. So, Ms. Barnes, who, you're with the, wanna again tell the listening audience who you represent and what your job is all about.

- Okay. So, my name again is Mona Barnes. I am presently the Director of the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency. Our responsibility to our community is to ensure emergency readiness for all hazards. I know you stated that we are, actually we're just in the beginning of the hurricane season. It started on 1 June, but we, at V.I.T.E.M.A., we are now in the pasture of all hazards, because we know about hurricanes, but there are other natural disasters that can actually come our way and so we try to prepare for all hazard. But, yes, we are in a hurricane season. It started, again, 1 June and it goes until November 30th. I do want to say to the community, earlier this year when we got the weather forecast from the National Weather Service, and I think I probably said it before, it was predicted that the 2017 hurricane season would be a below average season. However, as of May the 20, May 25th, the National Weather Service has now stated that we are in a, what they're calling above season. Whereas before we were predicting probably around eleven name storms with a probability of probably four to five or six becoming actual hurricane and then maybe one or two become in a category higher than a category two. That has now shifted where they are predicting there's a 70% chance that there will be eleven to seventeen actual name storms of which five or nine could be hurricanes and two of four can be major, which is category three, four, or five. And so I say all the time it only takes one, you know, and, sometimes it's good to give predictions, but I want the community to understand that man can control a lot of things, but we can't control the weather. And as the National Weather Service says, it's nothing but a prediction. And it takes nothing, it takes, it only takes one hurricane to come through to our area to make it a bad year. I try to remind people every time I have the opportunity when, Hurricane Marilyn, I believe, Marilyn or Hurricane Hugo came through the territory it was a below average season. So the predictions are there, but it's still important to V.I.T.E.M.A., as an agency, and you, as a citizen in the territory, to prepare yourself for this season.

- Yeah, as I heard it, I think I've listened to N.O.A.H. one day, the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration, they said they can predict the numbers fairly well, but the intensity of the storms they have no way of knowing, and let's say send in a Hurricane Hunter, one of those big airplanes that...

- That is correct, correct.

- And as V.I.T.E.M.A., what are some of the programs that you have in, ongoing to help Virgin Islanders prepare for these disasters?

- Well, so as we talk all hazards, I would want to believe that folks within the St. Thomas, you should now be seeing a lot of movement around. We are emplacing six more tsunami sirens within the St. Thomas area. During the carnival, we did seven new siren, tsunami sirens in the St. Croix district. I'm happy to say that starting on next week, the contractors will be back in St. Thomas, as well as St. John to put four tsunami sirens in St. John and I'm just really, really happy that we were able to now have, we're gonna have two sirens as well on Water Island. It becomes one of our major threats. We've also been able to now test the I.P.A.L. System which is a system that alerts when there are actual emergencies and we were able to test the system again, because we did it before but we were able to test it again during the

Vigilant Guard exercise. I know if most of you know about two and a half weeks ago you are seeing a lot of movements within the territory. We also have the C.E.R.T. Program. We have folks on the stuff that's doing outreach to different communities just speaking of all hazards, not necessarily hurricane season but that is included as well.

- Oh, could you explain the C.E.R.T. Program, that's a Citizens Emergency Response Team, because I know 2007, I participated in a weekend event where we got a lot of training. We got a green hard hat and a little bag, green package to assist in the, our immediate neighborhood. So, could you give more information about that and how people can become involved in that?

- Well, the purpose of the C.E.R.T. team is to help folks within the community in basic survival skills. If you see someone that badly fell down, you could just, you know, probably wrap their hand or explain if somebody is stick under a piece of rubble. So, it's just basic first aid. What we have done strategically is we have started and we've had students within the high schools, within the territory, some Junior high schools, some private schools again during the carnival season that we had all the monitors, the school monitors in St. Thomas that was trained and the thought behind C.E.R.T. is if you get certain people in certain pocket areas when there's a disaster, you have people that can administer immediate care, not that they're doctors or anything, but they at least have a, an idea of what to do to help to sustain lives. And so the purpose of C.E.R.T. for us is to get it within certain communities. We've done it in St. John as well. And just have more people within our territory to be able to administer first aid. C.P.R. is part of the class as well, and for this year we have already certified over 200 persons in the territory.

- Okay. And also, it was my understanding to help identify where people are so that they could be, checked on them, maybe persons need, special needs, or persons who have disabilities can also be identified and assisted if may, because they may not able to help themselves.

- Correct. Correct.

- And the training, how can people get in touch with your agency regarding training?

- Well, if anyone is interested in training from V.I.T.E.M.A., I can give you the numbers. The numbers in St. Thomas is 774-2244, St. Croix's is 773-2244, and in St. John is 776-2244, or they can feel free to come in to the office, sit with the planning and preparedness staff. We've gotten a lot of calls for persons asking to come into their community and so our training coordinator, as well as our C.E.R.T., we have a C.E.R.T. coordinator as well, goes to those areas and give the necessary training. So, if you're interested in having that training, not, it isn't necessary to have to be C.E.R.T. If it's information you want to know about tsunamis or anything that we can train, if we can train it within our agency, we have the capability and capacity to bring forth and to get training done.

- Oh, okay. Okay.

- Or to send folks away to get training, that's one of the other things that we do at V.I.T.E.M.A. with other governmental and non-governmental agencies. We send them abroad for training. My staff and other folks are from, within the territory are going to a hurricane conference. And so we just try to keep the people within the territory knowledgeable of all hazards.

- Okay. I know a few years ago, when there was a approaching storm, there was a issue regarding coordination of the various agencies of the government, and maybe private agencies, as to working together in the preparation. Can you sort of explain what happens when V.I.T.E.M.A. gets noticed, say 72 hours, there's a possibility you're in that, what, pre-hurricane warnings and what goes on and explain to the public what, how you and your agency coordinate the upcoming activities.

- Okay. So let me first start by saying I have what's called an Emergency Management Council. And so we meet, we try to meet monthly and it is comprised of governmental, non-governmental, and private sector. And so we come every month to discuss issues concerning emergency management. To your direct question, so if there is a imminent storm that's coming in, we get the official call from the National

Weather Service. And then based on what is briefed to us, we, if necessary, and really that's, it's a checklist that we use, if necessary then if we have to activate our Emergency Operations Center, then do that. We call in all the necessary agency heads to basically let them know what is, what is coming and just find out where they are, what they have, and then what we can predict and what we can prepare for. While you're doing that locally, I am making direct contact with the Federal Emergency Management Agency where the Caribbean Area Division is in Puerto Rico, and my biggest concern to them is ensuring that they have a I.M.A.T., which is, which is a Incident Management Assessment Team that can come forward prior to the storm to assist us, if in fact we are required or we need a federal assistance. I do want to tell the community as well, we do have, there's a center in Puerto Rico, Commodity Distribution Center in Puerto Rico that has pre-packed, or let me, let me say they have pre-packed food, water, things to get us to get through in probably the first one, two weeks. As the director of V.I.T.E.M.A., along with the F.E.M.A. representative, I have the ability to, what I want to ask or request that that stuff is moved from Puerto Rico to the Virgin Islands prior to a storm, speaking of hurricane now, or based on the prediction, if I would just leave it in Puerto Rico, it's already pre-packed, pre-staged, we already have contracts in place to actually move it by land, I mean, by sea first. Once it gets on the island then they move it by freight to what's called our points of distribution, if that becomes necessary. Again, those, that is one of the things that we tested during the Vigilant Guard exercise, so I don't know if some people in the territory was able to come out by Four Winds and it's actually where you can do like a drive-through, and pick up commodities. So they are, we, I truly believe that we are doing all that we can to prepare the territory, if there is a significant event. However, you can always do more, but I think, and I truly believe, with my staff, the agencies that are involved, we are prepared for, let's say, if it is a hurricane, we are prepared.

- Oh, okay. And what about personal planning, what advice do we have for the community with regard to within your own family circle, preparing for an emergency?

- Well the three things that I want the community to be aware of. One, they need to make a family disaster plan that addresses the needs of everyone in the home, including their pets. That is something that they can be doing now. If you have a plan and you work that plan, if something actually happens, it's just a matter of executing. Secondly, they need to build what we call an emergency supply kit with enough essential items, we say for probably three to five days, probably five to seven days. And that means your, you know, your medicine, if you have pets, you know, don't forget your pets, get food for them. And then thirdly, they need to stay informed about weather systems that may impact the territory. We have V.I.-Alert where we will send out alert if there is, let me say if there's a threat to the territory. However, you know, folks can just stay informed, listen, whether they turn to the weather channel and listen, whether they, you know, everything now is Facebook and Google, and just stay informed. They can also, again, like I said, they can go to V.I.-Alert. I would say it right at this present time, our, V.I.T.E.M.A.'s website is under construction. We've just closed a contract with a new webmaster. And so we are working that process of actually getting the website back up, and so if you are trying to get onto the website, that is what's happening right now, but I will still encourage you, if you have questions or concerns, you can actually call the office or look for messages on V.I.-Alert. And if you don't have V.I.-Alert, you should and must have V.I.-Alert. It's very important. It not only give you warning about imminent danger coming to the territory, but it also gives you, example if there's a issue with W.A.P.A., if there's a blocked road, if some, it's a bad accident and you want folks to drive another direction, you can get all that information through V.I.-Alert.

- Okay. And with the, some of the devices that you talked about, there's always electronics, W.A.P.A. being down, what do you advice the general public about those kind of issues?

- Well, I always tell people, you know, I, folks, I am old now, I still think I'm young, but, yeah, it's always good to have a radio with some batteries in it. We need to just be honest with ourselves in knowing any significant event for a period of time, we probably will not have power and/or electricity, I do want to say in St. Thomas, we were able to harden our emergency, well, the office in St. Thomas, so now all the lines for W.A.P.A. that's coming in are directly underground and tied directly to the airport, and so we will have, we will definitely have power in that building. Our project that took a little while, but we thank God that it has been completed. I wanna thank the great men of W.A.P.A. for the work that they did.

- Okay. Rolling up to a hurricane, one of the issues that I witnessed as being, again, with the Disability Rights Center, was movement of people to shelters and it was not within your term, in the prior administration, there was a gap that it was V.I.T.R.A.N. which, and V.I.T.R.A.N. Plus would move certain people with disabilities had shut down before they got moved to the shelters. And some of those gaps are, you know, are thought would be resolved through the meeting, monthly meetings that you were speaking of. How has that been addressed? I think it was either, it was 2010. I can't remember which, name of that storm was, but it was, one that was...

- Omar? Omar?

- Omar. Okay.

- Uh-hmm. Well, I would tell you, and I do have to give the credit to the staff at Public Works, actually V.I.T.R.A.N., the, I think her position is a director. Don't let me say the ranking, but she actually approached me as the Director of V.I.T.E.M.A. and she identified the gap, and basically said, you know, we can work together with V.I.T.R.A.N., V.I.T.E.M.A., and the Red Cross, because as she stated, a lot of people with disabilities are already known to V.I.T.R.A.N. because they pick them up and take them, and, to different areas. And so one of her recommendations was get that, getting that listing and we, and we, as well as Red Cross, having it on file. And so if in fact there is an emergency and we have to move folks, at least we have a start. We probably don't have everyone. I would strongly recommend if you know that you're a disable and in an area that would probably need to be, you would probably be, need to be moved and there's not a family member that you can go to, I would just ask you to call our office so that we can have that on a listing. And then, like you said, you learn as things happen. I know, I'm sure now that V.I.T.R.A.N. knows in that type of event, they now have to operate. But I would tell you, I thank, I can't remember her name right now but she works at V.I.T.R.A.N. and the staff at Public Works, because we are really and truly working together to, as you said, bridge the gaps. We can't, we don't, we have, I can't sit here and say we've bridged them all, but the one thing I can say when we recognize a gap, we address it.

- Okay. Well, part of it was V.I.T.R.A.N. Plus was, and V.I.T.R.A.N. was doing what they were doing, it was the scheduling of opening of the shelters so that while V.I.T.R.A.N. was operating before the storm, the shelter was open to move them there.

- Yeah. Well, all of, all of, like, and I said, you know, stuff happens, well, all of that would be in that preplanning, the, you know, the activating of the E.O.C.s, making that decision. If in fact we are going to open a shelter. What shelter are we going to open? Are we going to open just one or two, three or four? And those decisions on me based on the threat.

- Okay. And you also mentioned pets. What are some of the things that goes in with having pets available? Because I always remember after Hurricane Marilyn, those days after, we sort of got a dog, packs of dogs running around the community and I had children at the time, so I was kind of concerned that, and keeping our eye, an eye out for those packs of dogs after Hurricane Marilyn.

- Well, it is, again, it's a, it's a little better now. We, and I say we, in emergency management, we recognize that for some people, pet are like their children. And so if they do have to be moved to a shelter, they can bring a pet, they just have to be able to make sure that it's caged and, you know, everything is cleaned and decent within the shelters. But as time has passed, we have made provisions for persons that have pets and if they have to be at a shelter.

- Oh, well, some of those pets run away, that's what I'm saying, during this hurricane. I didn't know if anybody was...

- Well, I would tell you right now, we don't have a dog catcher system in place after an event. That, I can tell you. Hopefully, they'll broadcast they're scared and then when it's all said and done, they'll all come back to their, to their base.

- Okay. We're, we certainly hope in that, in that regard. But right now, we'll take a minute to listen to our sponsors and do something good for the neighborhood. Yes, welcome back, listening audience, to Ability Radio, You and Your Life. This morning, we have a distinguished guest, that's Mona Barnes, Director of the V.I.T.E.M.A. here with us talking about the upcoming hurricane season and some issues related to preparing the community. One of the things we talked about or which you had mentioned was some of the alerts or sirens that are here in the community. You wanna explain more about those?

- Yes. I wanted to, I remember while I was sitting here, I think it was last year, year before my first year when I came on this show and I was first talking about tsunami sirens and I remember I got a little, I won't say who it was, but they were concerned that there were no sirens in Bordeaux. And so I want to take the time this morning to now tell you where we have the additional sirens. As I stated before, there are 20 new sirens across the territory, seven on St. Croix, six on St. Thomas, it's actually five on St. John, and two on Water Island. So the St. Croix installation, it is all completed, so we now have a new siren placed by the, at A. Richards Junior High School. We have one in Estate Whim. We have one in Cane Bay. We have one in Southgate, Cotton Valley, La Grande Princesse by the former Elena Christian Junior High School, and Richmond near the John F. Kennedy Housing Community. In St. Thomas, new sirens are gonna be installed at compass Point, at Bordeaux, Bolongo Bay, and Frenchtown. And they started the first phase of this installation and we got two remaining, I think in St. Thomas that we are gonna take care of next week. You have Four Corners and you have Pilgrims Terrace. And then in St. John, it's by Calabash, Frank Bay, Hansen Bay, Rock Ridge Road, Roman, and the Francis Bay. And on Water Island, at Crown Bay and Catchment Hill. And I do want to say, you know, we were very strategic in placing the tsunami sirens. A lot of people are inland and asking why they don't have the siren. The purpose of a siren is for, one, folks that our outdoor, it's not designed for folks that are inside, between a one and two-mile radius on outside. And what we tried to do is strategically place the sirens in what we call in a danger zone, or which we will call a danger zone if there were to be a tsunami, the probability of the water getting to you is high. And so that is what we have to focus on first, our areas where our citizens are vulnerable. Here in St. Thomas, it's no secret that, you know, the majority of the, major government agencies, you got high school, you got the legislature, then you're moving at the fire station, which we'll have a fire station, and they're all in, within the in danger zone. And that's why we're trying to strategically place the sirens where they're most needed. So for those of you that are probably in Tutu on a hill, and you're saying that you can't hear the sirens, you probably won't because you're in what we consider a safe zone.

- So it's more along the coastal areas...

- Correct.

- ...is essentially that, where these sirens are, and if we're caught there in the coastal area and we hear the siren, we better start hopping, right?

- You better start running for higher ground. Yes.

- Well, I can't run right now that's why I said hopping.

- And also I do want to share, so we, another, a project that we're in the completion phase, we'll be distributing them for the upcoming school year. We had a local author and illustrator, Dr. Denise Bennerson, and the illustrator was Dr. Bully Petersen. I know, within the territory, he's well-known. And together, they have comprised children's book, a tsunami book for the, for the children, a private parochial, as long as you are in that elementary that we're focusing first on the first graders, to actually give them a book that they can read concerning a tsunami and, you know, the tsunami, the last one we had was in 1867, yeah, within the territory. And just giving them a mind of what happens and what they should do. I did that because if you don't know, I was a past teacher and I learned that if I really wanted the parents to do something, I would tell it to the children.

- Right.

- Children have a way of getting us to do what we need to do. And so once it becomes important to the children, then it's definitely gonna come in, become important to the parents. So we're very excited about that book. Again, I wanted to thank Dr. Bennerson as well as Dr. Bully Petersen for the time and effort that they did to...

- Well, that's good...

- ...construct the book.

- That's good to know. And where can the children get these books?

- Well, we're, actually the agency is going to go to every school and we are going to actually distribute the books. So, they don't have to come to us, we're going to go to them.

- Oh, okay. I kind of remember that when I was in grade school, they did that for fires where they've shown us how to get, have escape routes and be prepared for a fire in the home. We also mentioned the C.E.R.T. Program. Could you go on more detail about the C.E.R.T. Program? Because I, like I said, I went through the training program and I think it's a very helpful, even if the person doesn't get certified, if community groups come together and go through the training, because I think it helps, neighbor to neighbor approach. And because as I recall both after Hurricane Hugo and after Hurricane Marilyn, a lot of people couldn't approach the area where I lived in till we cut down some trees and got the roads cleared. So, there was a couple of days there that it was only neighbors to neighbor helping each other.

- Yeah. So we actually train adults and teens in the C.E.R.T. Program and it's a basic disaster response skill in, well, it teaches basic response skill such as first aid, light search and rescue, and small fire suppression. And at V.I.T.E.M.A. thus far, I said it before and I'll just make mention again, we've already trained over 200 teens and adults in this program. The schools where we actually have the C.E.R.T. Program is the St. Croix Central High School, the Educational Complex, the Seventh Day Adventist High School on St. Croix, then we have the Eudora Kean High School and the Addelita Cancryn High School. And in St. Thomas, and I'm sorry, the Seventh Day Adventist is in St. Thomas, and then [inaudible] we also certified the St. Thomas school monitors. So we, you know, we're trying to get it in the school, eventually if we can get, like, pockets of community, like if we can do a C.E.R.T. training for Tutu, if we can do a C.E.R.T. training for Oswald Harris Court, and just so that you can have people within your community that have these skills.

- And then how are these people known to the rest of the community? Because they sort of become like leaders in that regard. Is there any type of follow up to say, "Your C.E.R.T. representative is so on and so?"

- Well, at this time, no.

- Okay.

- Yeah. I would say no, not within the communities, but in, within the schools, there are no, you know, they have leaders within the schools and within other programs. But I tell you, it is a program I think that everybody should try their very best, if they can, to be a part of because who doesn't want to be a part of the potential of saving someone's life? And the more people that we have trained, the more people, more lives we can save. And so, and that, and that's what it's about in V.I.T.E.M.A. I tell people, when I go to bed every night, the one thing that worries me the most, it's not hurricanes because they're predictable. We can see them coming. Tsunami, depending on where it is, you don't have a lot of time to react, so that's why it's very important, and I stress it all the time to the community, that you take the time to just know where you are and know what to do. They can even, the folks in the community, they can come to the agency and get a map and just by looking at the map, you can tell if you're in the, in the danger, in a danger zone. So, we ask you to do that as well. We also, right now, we got a grant where we can do some more modeling of the seafloor just to, just to be able better to predict the probability of, if it's a certain magnitude, what we can expect. And just so the community could know. So, the thing about a

Tsunami is you never know when but you do know if it does come higher ground this one's gonna save your life.

- And I remember the, someone at the university, I can't remember his name. Mike Wallington.

- Professor Wallington.

- Wallington.

- Yes. And before you say anything else, I wanna give a shout out to Professor Wallington. He has, he continuous to be one of the mentors and assets to V.I.T.E.M.A. when it comes to Tsunami training. As a matter of fact, he travels with me and/or someone of my staff when we go to the National Tsunami Conferences, and again, he has always been someone that I can call anytime to get information, to glean knowledge. And so I wanna thank him for that.

- Yeah. As I was saying in part of it, what, he was preaching at the U.V.I., I went to a conference, was the Buys out in the ocean so that they can...

- Oh, the Buys.

- Buys.

- Buys. Yeah.

- Okay. It's my Southern accent here. [laughs]

- Oh. That's okay.

- 'm the...

- It's okay.

- I'm the ocean, so they can be or give the alert because they would, you know, I guess the waves would be in such a depth that they would give the alert or the signal. And are they, now are those tied to the sirens that are on land and the coastal zone there?

- No. They're not tied to the sirens.

- Okay.

- Because I always remember, the official warnings come from the National Weather Service and so the Tsunami, the buoys speak to what's called the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center, which we're a part of.

- Okay.

- And then it speaks to them, sends a message. It comes directly to our 911 Center basically telling us what has happened, what are the effects, what are their recommendations. It comes directly to a phone that I have as well. We are even upgrading that system where I can actually turn on the sirens from my phone. So, we're doing, you know, sometimes, people wonder what you're doing but because you're doing so much and it's behind the scenes, a lot of people don't know or see what you're doing. But I have to take this time to truly thank my staff at V.I.T.E.M.A. I would tell you, you know, everybody think their staff is the best staff, but in my two and, almost two and a half years at V.I.T.E.M.A., two things I've seen. I've seen the growth of my staff and I've seen the passion for emergency management and I wanna take this time to thank them because at times they come to me and they're like "Director," because I'm not computer and I'm not savvy, but I have folks on my staff and they'll be like, "But director, if we could tone it down from this 911 Center, why we can, why they can't come up with something, suppose that

something happened to the center or why you can't turn it from here or have somebody that can do it from there and so we have kind of redundancies. So, if an emergency, if an emergency happens, where we can actually get the sirens activated.

- That's good to know.

- And I do want to say though the sirens were built, we got it from my grand, from, for tsunami, there are other abilities of the siren. We, if there is a, if we want to say anything over there about seven or, to ten, I think, pre-scripted i.e. if it's a flood, if it's a hurricane, you know, any, just an emergency that you need to evacuate. So, there are, there are other pre-scripted messages within that siren system that we can utilize as well. But it was bought actually for, on a tsunami grant but it can also be used for other...

- Announce speech or emergency warning stuff.

- Yes. Yeah. And you can actually speak directly into the system. So, someone can actually, I can actually go into the system and just talk directly into the system and put out a message as well.

- Oh, good to know. Good to know. So, again, I also thank Professor Wallington for being the speaker for all of us. This is an issue that he brought up years ago and he kept at it until they're now in place and knowing that we have these emergency systems in place relieves a lot of the anxiety. One of the other things that I want you to speak about and also help the community to understand, you have, I wanted to get back to what you call pets, but we also have people who have service animals. Animals who provide services to human beings and I think there was an issue, too, in one of those that's come up in our service request of allowing service animals into the shelters. I don't know how that issue has worked out and how we can make sure that people understand service animals perform a service. Pets, they're comfort animals, they help, but service animals are necessary for the person. And I'm not sure if there's certain policies or procedures you have in place to protect the people who are in need of these service animals.

- Well, I will tell you, I don't say what I don't know. I know that's in the realm of the Red Cross, but I do know if it is a service pet and it has to be with that person, it's like a person, a person [inaudible]

- Yeah. To like care.

- Like a caregiver.

- Yeah.

- And so I am almost certain that the provisions for that has already been taken care. We, if we're able to take care of just pets that are just part of our family, service animals, I am sure we recognize them as part of that person and that would have to be accommodated.

- Okay. Oh, I mean, policies in place and actual people, you know, implanting those policies at the lowest level or, you know, direct contact, that's what we're concerned about because as a result, the law has been in place since 1992. [laughs]

- Okay.

- But I'm still having people calling me saying, "Hey, they got to go to the McDonalds and a policeman told them to get their dog out of the restaurant." Or, yeah, things...

- That's a little bit out of my realm.

- No. But I'm saying...

- But...

- No. But it's like I'm saying it's just a matter of training for the staff or training for those at the shelters would be greatly appreciated. We can offer that for free because they need to know the difference between a service animal and a pet. And there's three different federal laws, a lot of people don't understand it. And so we can help them discern which one is a comfort animal and which one is considered a service animal, you know, for people with disabilities, but...

- So, I'll probably have to get your number and have you guys a subject matter expert and have you, have you on, have you on call.

- Right. Right. Right. Well, that's why we're here, to get, you know, basically give education and information so that the public can understand and people aren't, get upset because they confront these issues on a daily, I don't know, a day to day basis, but that will certainly go a long way in that regard.

- I agree with you 100%.

- And how close does Red Cross work with V.I.T.E.M.A.? That's another issue.

- Oh, they're, they, listen, I would tell you Red Cross is, they're great. They're great, great. Every meeting, every training, every conference that we have asked them to attend, they are there, they're there to support, they come out, and when we're getting ready to ensure that the shelters are good for the people of the territories [inaudible] to come in, too, they come with us. Different agencies, we do the inspections of the hurricane, I mean, the shelters prior to hurricane season, so that was done and I would tell you that Red Cross has always, always been a part and always supports emergency management within the territory.

- Okay. And this, also does Red Cross give training events with regards to disaster and disaster preparedness?

- Yes. I know they do give trainings. I can't tell you when, but I do know, I know for sure, I, at one time, did C.P.R. through Red Cross. I know there's trainings that they, that they give to the people in the community.

- Okay. And also I wanna remind the public that it's, you can do call and we have the Director here at 779-1079 and 713-1079, to call in if you have any questions for our guest this morning.

- And so, see, this is how good technology is. So my deputies just text me to let me know that, to your question as far as the policy, if it is place, it is, it is in place and a room has been set aside for exactly what you were talking concerning the...

- The service animals? [inaudible]

- ...these service animals in St. Croix and that will be at the complex and for pets as well. So, thank you Deputy Director Louise.

- [laughs] And so...

- See? That's what I tell you about my staff. They know I'm on the radio and so they know...

- They got your back.

- They got my back...

- They got your back.

- side, and the front.

- [laughs]

- So, it's appreciated.

- That's good.

- It's appreciated.

- That's good. And do you have a list of where the shelters are, or is that determined at these monthly meetings? How does that occur?

- Well, that's already in place, but I will tell you, I don't have it in my mind but there are pre-set areas that we use for shelters. We have what we call "primary" and we have sec, we consider "secondary," and what we do is, again, as far as shelters, we try to put them in strategic areas where based on what is the topography or the population, where most people would have to come so they don't have to go a very long distance, you know, finding a building that can accommodate a person's, for a shelter so I know that we do have them. I can't tell you exactly, I can tell you some, I can't tell you all so I don't want to say one here, one there, and then, "Oh, you have none in my area." So I can get the information to you so that you can probably broadcast it in another program, but we already have primary and secondary shelters throughout the territory.

- Okay. And for those persons with disabilities, would that information be with V.I.T.R.A.N. or V.I.T.R.A.N. Plus? Because that's, when people get close to it and they are now getting anxious about it, one of the things is "Where do we go? Who do we call?" And just wondering if, is there a one central number or should they check with the treatment services, check with V.I.T.R.A.N. Plus?

- For? I'm sorry, for?

- For shelters and transportations.

- Well, there'll probably be an announcement, but again, if you're not sure, if it is in fact that we are, we are thinking about opening a shelter, that means our emergency operation center is already activated. So, if you call the numbers that I said before, somebody would answer the line.

- Okay. Okay.

- And, again, if I could tell you the numbers again, St. Croix 773-2244, St. Thomas 774-2244, St. John 776-2244.

- And you also mentioned that your website is down right now, but is there an anticipated time it would be up so...

- I really can't give you an anticipated time. I just have to be very honest. It's due to procurement process, but, you know, it's still some steps that has to be taken prior to the vendor being able to come and then have the website of, my Director Barnes's desire is between the next 60 to 90 days. Prayerfully, the site will be back up again. Even with the website, we're doing an upgrade to that system and when it comes up, I know it's gonna do the community great but, you know, sometimes, when it comes to procurement, you get kind of caught in between the actual moving from one vendor to the next and then unfortunately, the timing was off. My hope was that the system would have already been prior to the hurricane season, but it's not and so we are gonna work expeditiously to ensure that that is done. And so, see? My, I tell you, my staff is great. The other one called and said, "We do have special need shelter as well." When you were just asking about shelters, initially I was talking on, just of shelters for just...

- The general public?

- Person, the general public, but there are also special need shelters. What they do is they designate an area, I know the last time we had to activate an, open shelters, the special needs shelters was at the hospital at old Charles Harwood Hospital in St. Croix, and if I'm not mistaken by Human Service here in St. Thomas, but there is also sheltering for special need.

- Oh, okay. And then where they would have, like, care, um, caregiver type services as well...

- Exactly, exactly.

- ...and that, and that whole issue? Well, again, we're gonna step back a minute for the sponsors to come forward. And, again, we have Ms. Mona Barnes, Director of V.I.T.E.M.A., listening on us, tune back in. Welcome back, Virgin Islands. We are here, Ability Radio, with Dr. Mona Barnes of V.I.T.E.M.A. And the big question, why prepare? And a personal responsibility we all have to take in preparing for disasters. One of the, there are certain steps that you wanna say that people must do within their own home and community in getting ready for the hurricane season.

- Yeah. Just like I was sharing during the break, you know, people of the territory, you have a level of responsibility and emergency management for yourself and for your family. At V.I.T.E.M.A., and even governmental and non-governmental agencies that we work with, we are trying our best to ensure that we are prepared if it is in fact a significant event, but the citizens, you have to do the little things, i.e. have, you know, how much water you have right now in case there's a significant event. Don't wait until you hear a hurricane coming then everybody bombarding at the stores and rushing to get batteries and radio and waiting until a hurricane come in to then decide you're gonna get a generator. Those are the things that you need to be doing now. If you have persons process in your household that you know are on medication, ensure that their medication is up to date. Make sure you have a certain amount of food for your pet and, just like we say, it's about planning. When we fail, when we fail to plan then we plan to fail and so, you know, I think if, and I have to say it like this gently and I know my staff is, like, "Oh, where is she going with this one?"

- [laughs]

- But if you love your family as you say you do then you will do what is necessary to prepare them. You know, again, we cannot control the weather. You know, we can control a lot of things but we can't control the weather. We can't control systems, but what we can do is do our very best to be prepared that if something does happen, we're able to respond and that's just my, that's my take. I, if you have, you know, you got all your personal and your documents that you know you're going to need after an event, have it somewhere in a plastic where you can just reach it if you have to take it and, again, just prepare, have a family plan, have a, you know, a simple kit, supply kit, you know, so if something happens, you have at least the bare minimum that will work to help you survive.

- Yeah. It's at least for a couple days you were saying.

- Yes.

- Part of what we're doing now is informing the public, but one, like, the Director is saying, make a plan. Meet with family members, choose an out of town contact, decide where you're gonna meet people, if they're, after the storm. Buy your batteries, buy your water, buy your food, secure your documents and basically be prepared.

- Yes.

- And I think that's the message we wanna get out there for the general public and for persons with disabilities who may have to take other issues, make sure your medication or you have enough supply of medication involved, and even develop an action plan or a check list, who you need to contact in case you need transportation, or if you need other issues with regard. So it's all about working together, taking personal responsibility, V.I.T.E.M.A.'s there for the general public and can help and coordinate these [

inaudible] but we all have to take our own personal responsibility for these possible hazards that could come our way.

- I'm glad you said a word that you just said. V.I.T.E.M.A., we are a coordinating agency. I know, anything that happens, the first thing folks do is call V.I.T.E.M.A., but we actually coordinate for responses and the word now in V.I.T.E.M.A. is all "hazard." I know people are not quite adjusted yet, it's just what we're doing for hurricane season, what we prepare for all hazards year round, we, that's what our time is spent doing at V.I.T.E.M.A., is just continuously training, outreach, and preparation for any hazard that comes to our territory being able to respond. I tell, I make a joke with my staff and I tell them, you know, one, hurricanes are predictable and we've been through enough that if we're not prepared, then shame on me, you know, but, that, it's those others that keep me up. The tsunami, the, yeah, that, just the ones that you just don't predict, the, something severe, fire, or something happened with a cruise ship, and so we try to prepare for all those things. I wanna thank you so much for having me on this station.

- And thank you for coming. Thank you.

- I appreciate it. I wanna do one more thing before we leave, give a shout out to my mom because I know she is listening. Enjoy yourself, have fun.

- All right. Again, thank you, Virgin Islands, and get ready for a great weekend and upcoming summer. Take care.