

# Category 5 Hurricane Maria closes in on Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico

(CNN) Hurricane Maria's destructive tear across the Caribbean is well underway, with the Category 5 storm obliterating parts of Dominica, killing at least one person in Guadeloupe and threatening "catastrophic" damage to Puerto Rico within 24 hours.

Maria strengthened once again Tuesday afternoon and is now hurling 165 mph (265 kph) winds as it moves in on St. Croix.

"No generation has seen a hurricane like this since San Felipe II in 1928," Puerto Rico Gov. Ricardo Rosselló said Tuesday. "This is an unprecedented atmospheric system."

Rosselló urged Puerto Ricans to find safe shelters immediately, as emergency workers "will not be available to help you once the winds reach 50 mph."

"We need to keep in mind that we must also protect the lives of these first responders. It's time to act and look for a safe place if you live in flood-prone areas or in wooden or vulnerable structures," Rosselló said.

Maria has already killed one man in Guadeloupe after he ignored orders to stay inside and was struck by a falling tree, the island's government said.

Two other people are missing after a boat sank off the coast of La Désirade, a smaller island near the mainland of Guadeloupe. The government said about 80,000 people, or 40% of the households on the island, are without power.

The storm also caused "widespread devastation" in Dominica, Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit said Tuesday.

The hurricane shredded the prime minister's house overnight and left much of the island — population 73,000 — in ruins.

"So far we have lost all what money can buy and replace," Skerrit posted on Facebook Tuesday. He said his greatest fear was "news of serious physical injury and possible deaths as a result of likely landslides triggered by persistent rains."

A few hours earlier, the Prime Minister posted, “My roof is gone. I am at the complete mercy of the hurricane. House is flooding.”

Maria is now the strongest hurricane on record to make landfall in Dominica, a former French and British colony whose economy relies heavily on tourism and agriculture.

Now, Maria is taking aim on Puerto Rico and Islands already crippled by Hurricane Irma.

‘Don’t go out under any circumstances’

As of Tuesday afternoon, Maria was centered about 80 miles (130 kilometers) southeast of St. Croix — putting the island within reach of Maria’s tropical-storm force winds — and was headed west-northwest at 10 mph. At the speed it was going, Maria was less than 24 hours from San Juan.

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Sources: <http://www.cnn.com/2017/09/19/americas/hurricane-maria-caribbean-islands/index.html>

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