

OFFICE OF U.S. FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE (USAID/OFDA)

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, SAN JOSÉ, COSTA RICA



DART and Dutch Royal Navy staff inspect USAID plastic sheeting at Abaco port prior to its distribution. *Photo by USAID/OFDA*

The U.S. Provides Assistance to Hurricane-Affected Communities in The Bahamas

Hurricane Dorian—the second-strongest Atlantic storm on record and the strongest to ever strike The Bahamas—made landfall over The Bahamas’ Abaco and Grand Bahama islands from September 1 to 2 as a Category 5 storm with sustained winds of approximately 180 mph, resulting in at least 51 deaths. On Abaco—the hardest-hit island—Hurricane Dorian destroyed and damaged thousands of homes and buildings, destroyed infrastructure, and caused more than 6,000 residents to evacuate the island following the storm’s passing.

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Administrator Mark Green, after participating in an aerial survey of the damage, said “Some places it’s like nothing happened, other places, it’s like they were hit by a nuclear bomb.”

On September 2, U.S. Chargé d’Affaires Stephanie Bowers declared a disaster in The Bahamas due to the effects of Hurricane Dorian. USAID deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) to The Bahamas to lead the U.S. Government response, and activated a Washington, D.C.-based Response Management Team. DART staff joined the nine-person USAID team already located in The Bahamas to respond to the situation in coordination with other USG counterparts, Government of The Bahamas (GoB) representatives, and humanitarian partners.

The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) supported search-and-rescue efforts—led by the GoB National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the Royal Bahamas Defense Force—by deploying up to seven MH-

60 Jayhawk helicopters, three MH-65 Dolphin helicopters, and five Coast Guard cutters at various times during the response. The USCG conducted more than 130 emergency assistance flights, providing medical evacuations and emergency rescues for more than 400 people following the passing of the hurricane.

In coordination with the GoB, on September 4, USAID deployed 57 search-and-rescue staff and four canines from Fairfax County Urban

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DART members facilitated the distribution of relief supplies, including USAID plastic sheeting, to communities in Abaco. *Photo by USAID/OFDA*

Fairfax County USAR Team Conducts Safety Checks in The Bahamas

To rapidly assist the people of The Bahamas, USAID deployed 57 search-and-rescue specialists and four canines from Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department as part of the DART. The team traveled by land, air, and sea, assessing the damage and helping people in the worst-affected areas.

From sunrise to sundown, USAR members walked through marshes, debris, and mud in Abaco Island and surrounding cays, searching for survivors in more than 1,000 structures, including houses, bridges, health clinics, and schools. They also assessed the structures for damage to determine whether they were safe for people to return, and provided medical checks for people affected by Hurricane Dorian.

The USAR team assessed structures on a three-tiered scale, providing a “green” indication for functional structures with no damage or slight damage; “yellow” for moderate damage and the need for minor or moderate repair; and a “red” indication for severe or total damage. During the course of the assessments, the USAR team reported 100 green, 276 yellow, and 640 red structures. These assessments helped the GoB to understand the current situation and move forward in the rebuilding phase of the disaster.



USAR team members conducted aerial assessments of multiple islands immediately following the impact of Hurricane Dorian. *Photo by USAID/OFDA*



DART members assisted in the repair of a hurricane-damaged community center in Abaco. *Photo by USAID/OFDA*

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Search and Rescue (USAR), along with a small team from Los Angeles County Fire Department, as part of the DART to support coordination efforts. USAR team members searched more than one thousand structures during their ten-day deployment, including houses, schools, health clinics, stores, bridges, and police and fire stations, and assessed structural damage to determine whether they were safe for people to return.

USAID transported 53 metric tons of critical relief supplies from its warehouse in Miami to The Bahamas via commercial airlift, USCG transport, and a flight donated by the United Parcel Service. The supplies are sufficient to support 54,000 people, and include plastic sheeting to provide temporary shelter for 35,000 people, hygiene kits for 8,000 people, and water buckets and containers for 11,000 people, as well as four 10,000 liter water bladders. The relief supplies are being distributed by The Bahamas Red Cross and NEMA.

To help communities that were left isolated after Hurricane Dorian, USAID/OFDA requested the unique capabilities of the U.S. Department of Defense United States Northern Command (NORTHCOM) to provide transportation and logistics support for the USAID-led humanitarian response efforts. This included transporting humanitarian supplies and personnel between Abaco, Grand Bahama, New Providence, and the numerous small cays that were impacted by Hurricane Dorian. As of September 18, 2019, NORTHCOM had flown 132 missions to affected areas, transporting nearly 146 metric tons of relief supplies and search equipment, along with 417 response personnel.

As hurricane season runs through November 30, “the ability to even start to try to help people repair homes ... is critical. You want to do that as quickly as you can because the next two months, the chance of rain is still out there,” said DART team lead Tim Callaghan.

As of September 24, the United States had provided more than \$25 million in humanitarian assistance to help people affected by Hurricane Dorian. This amount includes 53 metric tons of non-food relief items, nearly \$8.5 million in logistics support from the Department of Defense, and 14,000 ready-to-eat meals, as well as funding for health, shelter, and water, sanitation, and hygiene programs.

Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance
Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean



Tel: +(506) 2290-4133
Email: ofdalac@ofda.gov
Internet: www.usaid.gov