



To: All News Editors

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## **NWC GETS READY FOR HURRICANE SEASON But Systems Remain Vulnerable**

The National Water Commission (NWC), Jamaica's primary provider of essential water and wastewater services, is reporting a high state of readiness in its disaster preparedness machinery while at the same time cautioning that its systems remain vulnerable and hence may be affected by events in the just-started Atlantic Hurricane Season.

Operating within the context of the inherently vulnerability of water and wastewater systems the world over to extreme weather events, the National Water Commission has taken several steps aimed at reducing the risk of damage to its systems and to enable the speediest and most effective return to normality should its systems be affected by hurricanes, storms or flood events.

“Within the limitation of our available resources, the NWC has already taken several steps to prepare for this Hurricane Season, and has taken into consideration both the best practices within the water industry worldwide and the cumulative experiences of our employees and managers in managing our particular systems under disaster conditions”, says Corporate Public Relations Manager Charles Buchanan.

Among the steps already taken are:

- The company's Hurricane Disaster Preparedness Manual has been revised, updated and circulated with details of operational actions and assignments;
- Containerization of some standby generator units to enable deployment to areas of greatest need;
- Emergency supplies and equipment are being re-stocked;
- Disaster Preparedness Meetings and Workshops have been held;
- Arrangements are being finalized with critical external partners, suppliers and contractors as to the likely need for assistance;

- Operational steps such as clearing over-hanging trees, servicing of generators, disaster-related maintenance of facilities and cleaning of on-property drains, etc. are also being done;
- Employees have been put on notice by the President to prepare for the season;
- The NWC President will be conducting review meetings with senior managers on the implementation of preparedness measures.

Even with the steps already taken, NWC President Mr. E. G. Hunter is careful about unrealistic public expectations. “Despite the best efforts of the NWC, water supply and wastewater systems around the world are extremely vulnerable to hurricanes and extreme weather events. There is no such thing as a ‘hurricane-proof’ water system,” he said.

Pointing to some of the inherent risks to water and wastewater systems, Mr. Buchanan said many of the 460 water supply systems across the island, of necessity, have intakes in riverbeds and are susceptible to flood damages and blockages; of the other systems, wells are often located in low lying plains and susceptible to flooding; most systems are heavily dependent on National Power Grid for operations; more than 9,000 kilometres of undulating pipeline susceptible to land slides, pipeline dislocation and breakages; water sources are at risk of contamination and muddy inflows (high turbidity) after heavy rainfall; and most water systems are at least partly situated in very remote areas that are difficult to access.

Because of these unavoidable risks and challenges, the Corporate Public Relations Manager says, “Everyone has a responsibility to do their part and be prepared by storing potable water for an emergency. While hoping and working for the best we must also be prepared,” Mr. Buchanan said.

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