

EPA Responds to Puerto Rico Earthquakes; Assessing Sites and Facilities to Help the Puerto Rico Government

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San Juan, Puerto Rico The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is responding to the recent series of damaging earthquakes in Puerto Rico. EPA is working under a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) mission assignment focused on lending aid to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and Puerto Rico government agencies as they assess water infrastructure. The agency is also using its own authorities to assess certain facilities and sites across Puerto Rico. EPA is conducting proactive and strategic engagement with its federal and public sector partners as well as the government of Puerto Rico while highlighting the foundation for a strong, resilient recovery that assures the protection of public health and the environment.

“Our hearts go out to all of those impacted in Puerto Rico, not only by the challenges these earthquakes pose, but by the ongoing recovery work from Hurricane Maria,” **said EPA Regional Administrator Pete Lopez.** “EPA is fully committed to providing support to the government of Puerto Rico and assisting the communities impacted by these disasters.”

EPA is working in close coordination with the government of Puerto Rico using partnerships that were further strengthened during the response and long-term recovery from recent

hurricanes.

”DNER is working in close coordination with the Puerto Rico Emergency Management Bureau and federal agencies, such as EPA, to respond to incidents that may affect the environment and citizens of the impacted areas. We are also assisting in the establishment of Temporary Debris Management Centers and providing technical assistance to evaluate the location and establishment of shelter facilities. DNER is working to ensure compliance with land, water and air rules and regulations. Our collective efforts to help the people affected by these seismic events won’t rest until the region is stabilized,” **said Armando Otero, Secretary of the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (DNER).**

“The help of the federal government has been crucial in the recovery process of past emergencies and instrumental during the response stage of the current emergency Puerto Rico is facing after the recent seismic events. We are certain that with the support of agencies like the EPA, many lives will be saved, and a more resilient island will be built. The oversight to the community aqueducts and the improvement of those facilities will help to sustain health and the prevention of diseases. We look forward to keep strengthening our ties to overcome this new challenge, which has impacted different environmental aspects of our island, so that our citizens quickly recover and are better prepared for any future emergency,” **said Dr. Rafael Rodríguez Mercado, Secretary of the Puerto Rico Department of Health.**

EPA is assisting USACE and the government of Puerto Rico as they determine the operational status of and conduct damage and needs assessments at drinking water and wastewater facilities, including those systems not operated by the public utility, Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewer Authority (PRASA). EPA has a robust and close partnership with the small drinking water systems not managed by PRASA. Approximately 3% of Puerto Rico’s population is served by non-PRASA and private drinking water systems through approximately 240 facilities throughout the island. Together with community entities, non-profit organizations and academic institutions under a Water Coalition, EPA is working to assess the needs of these systems and take action to make them more sustainable and resilient.

EPA is in the process of determining the operational status of oil and chemical facilities on the island. This includes determining if facilities currently have power or backup power, whether there were any oil or chemical releases, and whether such releases could potentially occur due to damage at the facility.

EPA has received information about all of the 23 bulk oil facilities in Puerto Rico, with two facilities reporting releases that were contained in secondary containment onsite. EPA is partnering with the U.S. Coast Guard to confirm that these spills are under control.

EPA has also gathered information about the 51 Puerto Rico chemical facilities subject to EPA’s Risk Management Plan requirements. Currently, there appear to be no major visible issues at

any of these facilities.

EPA is continuing to gather on-the-ground information about its 22 National Priority List (NPL or Superfund) sites and two shorter-term cleanup (removal) sites. The two removal sites have no damage. EPA has no reports of visible issues at any of the NPL sites and has confirmed that there are no observable issues or releases at five of the NPL sites. EPA continues to gather on-the-ground information about the balance of its NPL sites.

EPA is actively gathering information about facilities subject to Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasure (SPCC) regulations. So far, EPA has received one report of an incident, which is being addressed. EPA has sent out an expert to assess the incident and will continue to gather information about all other SPCC facilities.

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