



For more information, contact:
Dan Romanchik, KB6NU
ARDC Communications Manager
858.477.9903, dan@ardc.net

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Virgin Island Amateur Radio Group Bolsters Repeater Infrastructure in the Territory

ARDC grant will enable the group to purchase backup repeaters, improve repeater coverage, and train and outfit new hams.

November 19, 2021— When two Category 5 hurricanes — Irma and Maria — hit the Virgin Islands in 2017, hams there knew they had to do something. The two monster storms left the power grid and communication infrastructure in shambles. 95% of St. Croix’s electric utility poles were destroyed, and many antenna towers were down. As a result, the USVI Government’s primary land-mobile-radio (LMR) trunked radio system was essentially non-functional, and the National Guard could not be heard on any radio frequency for a week following the storms.

Territory radio clubs immediately went into action, employing skills learned during hundreds of hours of training exercises. St. Croix ham operators quickly established a daily high-frequency (HF) net for first response agencies. A single surviving ham repeater provided limited communications between islands. These links provided critical information and communications for governmental and non-governmental agencies including FEMA, Department of Defense, Transportation Security Agency, National Park Service, VI National Guard, Red Cross, and local police and fire services.

A \$27,955 grant from Amateur Radio Digital Communications (ARDC) will help them bolster the amateur radio infrastructure and train new amateur radio operators, thereby improving their ability to respond to disasters in the future. The funds will allow the Virgin Islands

Amateur Radio Group (VIARG) – a group formed after the 2017 hurricanes – to purchase backup repeaters, commercial-grade antennas that will improve the resiliency and coverage of the repeaters, and training materials to help new amateurs get licensed and on the air.

VIARG President Fred Kleber, K9VV (NP2X) commented, “The generous ARDC grant will allow VIARG to improve and harden the territory’s critical amateur repeater system, and adding digital communications capabilities marks a new chapter for new and future territory amateurs.”

About Virgin Island Amateur Radio Group (VIARG)

The Virgin Islands Amateur Repeater Group (VIARG) was formed in 2017 following devastating twin Category 5 hurricanes Irma and Maria in the territory of the United States Virgin Islands (USVI). VIARG’s primary goal is implementing, maintaining and expanding a linked repeater system to connect USVI hams and promote amateur radio in the Territory. By doing so, VIARG supports its federal and territorial partners, as well as other non-governmental organizations (NGOs). While many people may consider ham radio “just a hobby”, it is certainly more than that to members of the Virgin Islands Amateur Repeater Group. Learn more about amateur radio in the United State Virgin Islands at <http://www.vihamradio.org>.

About ARDC

Amateur Radio Digital Communications (ARDC) is a California-based foundation with roots in amateur radio and the technology of internet communication. The organization got its start by managing allocations of the AMPRNet address space, which is designated to licensed amateur radio operators worldwide. Additionally, ARDC makes grants to projects and organizations that follow amateur radio’s practice and tradition of technical experimentation in both amateur radio and digital communication science. Such experimentation has led to broad advances for the benefit of the general public, including the mobile phone and wireless internet technology. ARDC envisions a world where all such technology is available through open source hardware and software, and where anyone has the ability to innovate upon it. Learn more about ARDC at <https://www.ampr.org>.