



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
REGION 2  
290 BROADWAY  
NEW YORK, NY 10007-1866

**MEMORANDUM**

**DATE:** January 19, 2021

**SUBJECT:** Response to Office of Inspector General Final Report No. 21-P-0032:  
"Region 2's Hurricanes Irma and Maria Response Efforts in Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands Show the Need for Improved Planning, Communications, and Assistance for Small Drinking Water Systems," dated December 3, 2020

**FROM:** Peter D. Lopez  
Regional Administrator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Peter D. Lopez".

**TO:** Kathlene Butler  
Director, Water Directorate  
Office of Evaluation  
Office of Inspector General

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments to the subject audit report.

AGENCY'S OVERALL POSITION

EPA concurs with the OIG's recommendations and appreciates the OIG's acceptance of the Agency's corrective actions.

AGENCY'S ADVISORY COMMENT

With respect to the last sentence in the first paragraph under the section: *Technical, Managerial, and Financial Capacities of Water Systems*, in the **Introduction** on page 2 of the Final Report, we believe it would be more accurate to say "It is widely known and well understood that rural water systems in Puerto Rico face long-standing capacity issues thus hindering their resilience."

AGENCY'S SUPPLEMENTAL RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 2

Region 2 wants to reiterate that the travel times to Puerto Rico and the USVI, unlike other parts of Region 2, do not allow for rapid deployment of personnel. The Region engaged its local staff in preparing for and conducting the disaster work, but given the scale of the hurricanes, all the local staff were personally affected by the storms, and were not available to be "fully engaged" prior to or some period of time after landfall. The Region spent the first days after the storms tracking down its employees, in the absence of regular cell phone service or passable roads, to assure everyone was safe. Furthermore, the Region deployed emergency response personnel from the mainland in advance of and immediately following Hurricane Irma, only to evacuate all

but a skeleton crew, for safety reasons, in the face of Hurricane Maria. All other deploying agencies (e.g., FEMA) did the same.

#### CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions regarding this response, please let me know or have your staff contact Arlene Chin, Region 2's Audit Coordinator, at (212) 637-3408 or [Chin.Arlene@epa.gov](mailto:Chin.Arlene@epa.gov), or Rudnell (Rudy) O'Neal, Chief, Grants and Audit Management Branch, Mission Support Division, at (212) 637-3427 or [Oneal.Rudnell@epa.gov](mailto:Oneal.Rudnell@epa.gov).

cc: Doug Benevento, Associate Deputy Administrator  
Mandy Gunasekara, Chief of Staff  
Anna Wildeman, Acting Assistant Administrator, Office of Water  
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