



## News Release

For Immediate Release

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### **Virginia Department of Forestry Prepares for Natural Disasters Affecting Community Forest**

(Blacksburg, VA) Many Virginia localities have experienced significant infrastructure damage this hurricane season. Downed or damaged trees in our community forest – the trees in our neighborhoods and where we live, work and play, are an important and very visible part of that infrastructure. October 23-25 the Virginia Department of Forestry, in partnership with USDA Forest Service and the Virginia Department of Transportation, is conducting Urban Forest Strike Team (UFST) Task Specialist training at Virginia Tech for rapid tree risk assessment and FEMA debris estimates.

The training gives participants, all of whom are certified arborists, hands-on experience identifying the risk that storm-damaged trees pose to people and property on publicly managed land (i.e. road rights-of-way, parks, public buildings, etc.).

UFST are self-contained teams of professionally trained certified arborists from state forestry agencies, other state and municipal agencies, and the USDA Forest Service that are specifically trained to assess risk on storm-damaged trees.

These teams are deployed to assist communities with assessment of storm-damaged trees with the goal to retain as many viable trees as possible and to identify and map trees that meet FEMA criteria for risk. With the data from the UFST reports communities will be prepared to apply for assistance financial from FEMA in mitigating the damage from the hurricane, tornado, ice storm or other the natural disaster.

All UFST specialists have had extensive specialized training in assessing damage from natural disasters and providing evaluations of the trees to determine their needs for pruning and or removal as a result of the disaster.

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## Urban Strike Team

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“The training being provided this week emphasizes using UFST tree risk and FEMA protocols to rapidly determine if storm damaged trees can be saved, or must be removed after a storm,” said VDOF Forestry Specialist and Virginia Coordinator for the UFST David Stone. “As a result, our teams help communities recover from natural disasters, receive public disaster assistance to manage their urban trees and develop resilience in the long run.”

UFST Teams were created in 2007 following lessons learned in trying to retain storm damage public trees after Hurricane Katrina. Since 2008, UFST teams have been deployed nationally to about 44 incidents to assist communities in post storm recovery.

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The Virginia Department of Forestry protects and develops healthy, sustainable forest resources for Virginians. With nearly 16 million acres of forestland and more than 108,000 Virginians employed in forestry, forest products and related industries, Virginia forests provide an overall economic output of more than \$21 Billion annually.

Headquartered in Charlottesville, the Agency has forestry staff members assigned to every county to provide citizen service and public safety protection across the Commonwealth, which it's been doing now for more than 100 years. VDOF is an equal opportunity provider.