



GOVERNMENT OF PUERTO RICO

Federal Affairs Administration

**National Center for
Disaster Preparedness**

EARTH INSTITUTE | COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Puerto Rico Governor names Dr. Irwin Redlener co-chair of planning for Hurricane María Committee

“9/20 Committee” to establish new mechanisms to estimate short and long-term fatalities caused by both natural and man-made disasters

Puerto Rico Governor Ricardo Rosselló has created the 9/20 Committee, a group of public health and administration specialists that will assist the government in the creation and revision of death certification protocols and improve accountability and the management of information regarding fatalities caused by natural and man-made disasters.

The Committee will begin its work with a Phase 1 planning period co-Chaired by Dr. Irwin Redlener, director of the National Disaster and Preparedness Response Center (NDPRC) at Columbia University and Carlos Mercader, executive director of the Puerto Rico government’s Federal Affairs Administration (PRFAA. During this initial phase, guidelines will be established for moving forward with the full Committee.

Hurricane Marías’ passage through the island on Sept. 20, 2017 revealed the U.S. territory’s vulnerability in facing these types of disasters, especially when tallying fatalities directly and indirectly caused by the storm.

On February 22, Gov. Rosselló commissioned a study by the George Washington University’s Milken Institute of Public Health to assess mortality related either directly or indirectly to Hurricane María. In its findings, released on August 28, the researchers observed an excess of 2,975 deaths between September and February 2018.

The 9/20 Committee will establish protocols to implement the Milken Institute of Public Health recommendations outlined in its report.

Throughout the disaster, Mr. Mercader has coordinated communications between the Puerto Rico government and federal agencies to facilitate an improved response from both the federal and local governments.

“The George Washington University’s excess mortality study was a novel approach at tabulating death tolls, not just in Puerto Rico but worldwide. It is our intention that this Committee serve as a model for the whole of the United States so that we can more adequately assess mortality but more importantly, avoid the loss of life during and after both natural and man-made disasters”, said Carlos Mercader.



GOVERNMENT OF PUERTO RICO

Federal Affairs Administration

Dr. Redlener is a renowned public health and disaster specialist and currently leads one of the country's most important centers for disaster response and mitigation at the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

"The establishment of the 9/20 Committee means Puerto Rico is positioning itself to lead the way in researching and implementing new methods to standardize how short and long-term disaster-related fatalities may be most effectively tabulated. These new strategies will be valuable in any jurisdiction experiencing a major disaster," Dr. Redlener said.

Gov. Rosselló thanked Mr. Mercader and Dr. Redlener for their leadership and vision in leading this historic Committee.

"As we begin the long-term reconstruction of our island, we are committed to building a safer, more resilient Puerto Rico. This Committee will play a key role in the future of Puerto Rico, as it will establish the appropriate protocols and guidelines so that we are better prepared in the face of a disaster such as Hurricane María," he said.

"I thank all the members of the 9/20 Committee. Their work and its implementation will be crucial both for accounting for those that perished and preparing ourselves for what the future might hold."

For further information about Dr. Redlener contact:

Eric J. Greenberg

Chief of Staff

Director of Communications

National Center for Disaster Preparedness

eg3008@columbia.edu

646 708 7411