

An International & Industry Liaison Branch Publication

Trade Beat

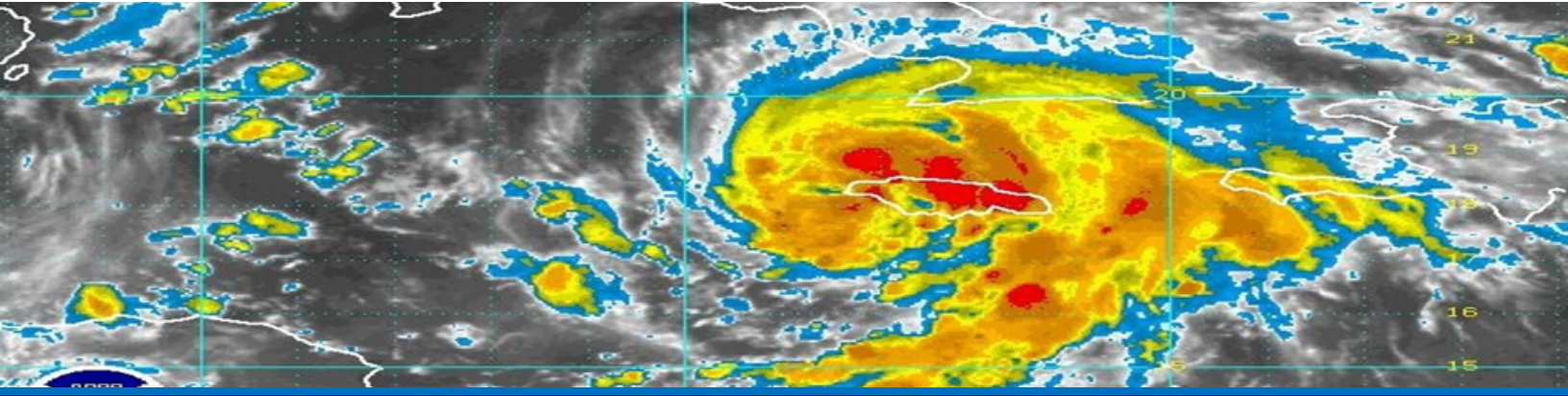
JAMAICA CUSTOMS AGENCY

SEPTEMBER 2023

VOLUME 17 ISSUE 1



Natural Disaster Preparedness & Management - The Role of Customs



NATURAL DISASTER PREPAREDNESS & MANAGEMENT

There is a growing awareness of the risk of economic and trade disruptions caused by natural disasters. Natural disasters are natural events such as a flood, earthquake, or hurricane that causes great damage or loss of life. The World Economic Forum's Global Risk Report 2018 ranks 'extreme weather events' and 'natural disasters' as the number one and number two risks most likely to occur in the next ten years by a multi-stakeholder panel. Since 2000, direct and indirect economic damage has averaged US\$113 billion per year, (IMF, 2017). According to AON, a leading global service providing firm, in 2020 direct economic losses and damages from notable natural disasters were assessed at US\$268 billion. That figure increased to US\$313 billion in 2022. The Caribbean has been particularly affected, with annual losses equivalent to 2.4% of GDP.

The Caribbean islands share many characteristics, including their vulnerability to natural hazard occurrences, particularly hurricanes and tropical storms, being seven times more likely to be hit by natural disasters than larger states. The economic cost of these disasters for the Caribbean is substantial, exceeding US\$ 22 million per year, and as a result their economies are under constant threat. Typically, there is a sharp deterioration in the trade balance, where import bills for food, raw materials and construction materials tend to rise, while exports tend to decline. Public debt rises as imports put pressure on the current budget and tax revenue falls.



CARICOM RESPONSE

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has responded to the pervasive impact of natural disasters in a bold and proactive way. The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency CDEMA, formerly CDERA, which was established by an Agreement of the Conference of Heads of Government in 1991, bears the motto 'Managing Disaster with Preparedness'. CDEMA is mandated to 'make an immediate and coordinated response to any disastrous event affecting any member state, once the state requests such assistance.

Other functions of CDEMA includes:

- Securing, collating and channeling to interested governmental and non-governmental organizations, comprehensive and reliable information on disasters affecting the region
- Mitigating or eliminating, as far as possible, the consequences of disasters affecting member states.

CDEMA, whose membership comprises of nineteen (19) states including Jamaica, is open to all members and non-members of CARICOM in the Caribbean region.





Marcus Garvey Drive, Kingston

THE JAMAICAN CONTEXT

The damages and losses associated with hurricanes, storms, floods and other natural disaster induced events have not only increased over the past two decades, but these events also dampened Jamaica's productive capacity and caused social disruptions, negatively impacting the country's GDP, balance of payments, trade and fiscal position. In the past, natural disasters have impacted Jamaica's social and productive sectors, infrastructure, environment and emergency operations. Major hurricanes and storms have caused damages to agriculture, tourism, communication, energy, water systems, road networks and property infrastructures. The scope, social and economic implications necessitate a coordinated approach to mitigation, such as that adopted by the Government of Jamaica (GOJ).

Jamaica's natural disaster response is a coordinated public/private sector partnership that encompasses several functional levels and varying responsibilities. Under the authority of the Disaster Risk Management Act, 2015, Jamaica's disaster management effort is led by the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM) and is broken down into several groups and committees at the national, regional, parish and community level. Guidance on the roles and responsibilities of each entity is provided in the National Disaster Plan, the National Disaster Strategy and the Disaster Risk Management Structure. Jamaica provides dedicated budgetary support for disaster risk management in its national budget. The GOJ has earmarked J\$2.3 billion in resources to counter the risk of natural disasters for the financial year 2022/2023.



CUSTOMS ROLE IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT

One of the most important functions of trade is that of a 'shock-absorber' for natural disasters. Trade allows the supply shortage in one location to be covered by imports from other unaffected countries. These imports play a very important role in a country's recovery and reconstruction as they allow for access to much-needed resources like goods and services.

The World Customs Organization (WCO) recognizes that Customs administrations play an important role in their national government's overall planning and preparation for natural disasters. Issues concerning the transit of relief goods to another State affected by a disaster, including delays upon entry and exit of international humanitarian personnel, goods and equipment bound for another State are also highly relevant in ensuring the timely delivery of humanitarian aid to its destination. These issues are specifically addressed in Specific Annex J, Chapter 5 of the International Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures, also known as the Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC). Jamaica acceded to the RKC in May 2021, and was entered in to force on August 7, 2021. The guidelines of the RKC are aligned with the JCA's procedures for processing disaster relief items, which have been implemented within the context of national legislation and policies.

The Agency is integrally woven into the fabric of the country's national disaster planning framework. As the foremost border protection agency, the JCA is a member of the National Disaster Risk Management Council and sits on the following committees:

- Humanitarian Assistance Committee (HAC)
- Emergency Relief Clearance Sub-Committee
- Recovery Planning
- Public Information & Education

In 'normal times' the HAC of the National Disaster Risk Management Council (NDRMC) is charged with oversight for Relief Clearance planning. The Port Relief Clearance Working Group (PRCWG) is an extension of the HAC tasked with working on issues directly related to relief clearance, for e.g. maintenance of the plan for relief clearance.



Relief Clearance – Sequence of Activities at NEOC Activation



The National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC), upon activation, is responsible for the coordination of relief clearance at ports of entry. The PRCWG is activated as the Port Relief Clearance Team (PRCT) and carries out relief clearance. The PRCWG is co-chaired by the Ministry of Finance and the Public Service and the Jamaica Customs Agency with the following membership:

- Ministry of Finance and the Public Service
- Ministry of Industry, Investment & Commerce
- Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries
- Kingston Wharves Limited
- Jamaica Constabulary Force
- Ministry of Health & Wellness
- Pesticides Control Authority
- Passport, Immigration & Citizenship Agency (PICA)
- Airports Authority of Jamaica
- Jamaica Customs Agency
- Port Authority of Jamaica
- Kingston Freeport Terminal
- Jamaica Defence Force
- MJB Airports Limited
- Ministry of Local Government
- Ministry of Labour and Social Security
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Foreign Trade
- The Trade Board Limited
- The Department of Co-operatives and Friendly Societies (DCFS)
- National Compliance and Regulatory Authority (NCRA)
- Food Storage and Prevention of Infestation Division
- Customs Brokers and Freight Forwarders Association of Jamaica

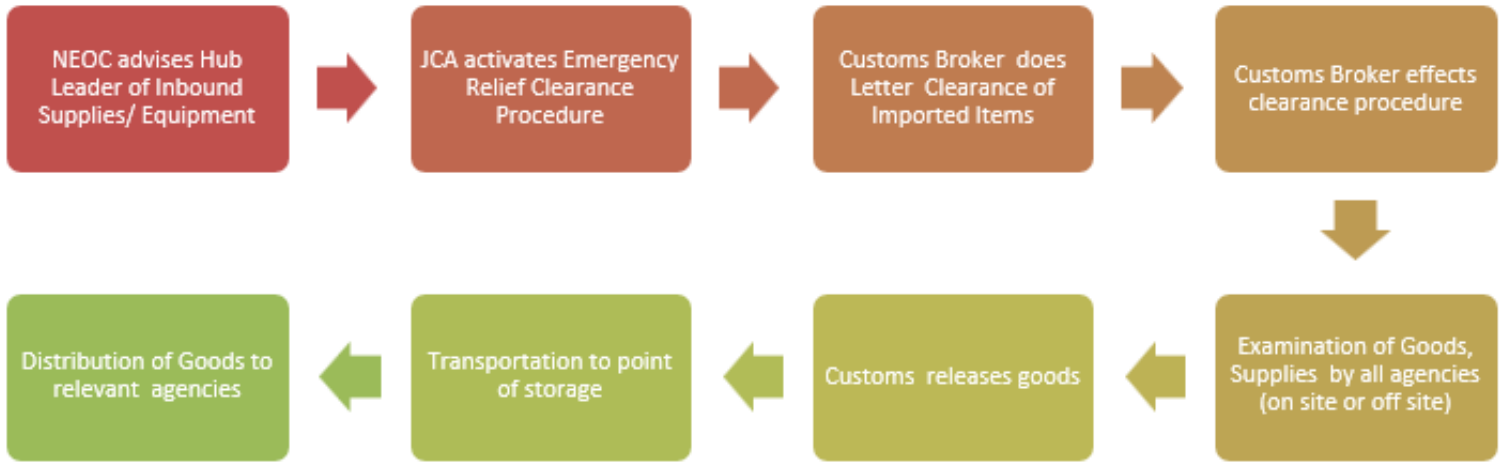
The role of the Agency is clearly defined in the National Emergency Relief Clearance Plan (NERCP), which provides the framework used by the Government of Jamaica for post-disaster clearance of personnel, equipment and supplies at ports of entry. The NERCP functions as a sub-plan of the Shelter, Welfare and Relief Clearance Plan and supports the Humanitarian Assistance Policy and Plan (HAPAP).

The JCA's role in relief clearance includes:

- Processing of personnel arriving for relief efforts
- Processing of personnel departing for relief efforts in other states
- Processing of equipment and supplies arriving for relief efforts
- Processing of in-bound and out-bound transportation assets (air and sea)
- Processing of equipment and supplies departing for relief efforts
- Operation of a Port Relief Clearance Hub in support of activities (One Stop Shop for Emergency Relief Clearance)

These activities are outlined in the National Emergency Relief Clearance Plan and will conclude when the relief assistance is cleared and handed over to the receiving entity and personnel have been processed by Immigration and Customs and cleared for entry.

Procedure for Receiving and Clearing Relief Items



The JCA has been proactive in ensuring the Agency's preparedness in emergency and disaster relief. The Agency, under the direction of Ms. Arlene Lawrence, Director of Occupational Health, Safety & Environment, has been engaged in national planning activities and has developed the Agency's Emergency Preparedness & Response Plan. This plan is a living document and is the result of a consultative and integrated approach, encapsulating input from across the various areas of the JCA. It also forms the basis for operational procedures for the processing of disaster relief items, providing a robust framework, which incorporates the process for both ASYCUDA online and ASYCUDA offline/manual clearance, and coordinated border activities. In demonstration of its commitment to private sector engagement and trade facilitation, the Agency is currently working on guidelines specifically for external stakeholders regarding clearance of relief items.

References:

1. Ram, J. (2022). Socio-economic and Financial Implications Assessment of Climate Change in Jamaica, The Commonwealth Secretariat Country Report. Retrieved from: https://production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2022-04/Socio-economic%20and%20Financial%20Implications%20of%20Climate%20Change%20on%20Jamaica_Final_UPDF%20March%202022.pdf?VersionId=OFHEbY0NfMqm3O3VnYH05bUZxd5x7GfS
2. National Legislation, Plans & Policies. Retrieved from: <https://www.odpem.org.jm/national-legislation-plans-policies/>
3. National Emergency Relief Clearance Plan 'Pocket Version' (For the Facilitation of International Disaster Relief and Assistance), ODPEM (May 2021)

The International & Industry Liaison Branch (IILB) is committed to raising awareness on topics relating to the International Trade, as well as issues concerning the Caribbean Community which may affect our internal and external stakeholders.

Our quarterly Newsletter seeks to highlight global trade topics and their importance to Customs Administration worldwide, specifically as it relates to the Jamaica Customs Agency.

As we realize our vision to becoming a modern customs administration delivering excellent service, we recognize the importance of knowledge transfer in delivering our objectives and use this forum as one way of contributing the vision of Jamaica Customs Agency (JCA). The IILB is located at JCA's Head Office, and our officers are available to respond to your trade-related queries. Contact us at: iilu@jca.gov.jm



Jamaica Customs Agency Head Office located in Kingston, Jamaica