

Iron Duke on Caribbean hurricane alert

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Royal Navy warship HMS Iron Duke is on high alert in the Caribbean to provide assistance should Hurricane Gustav wreak havoc in the region.



RFA Wave Ruler and HMS Iron Duke working together in The Caribbean [Picture: LA (Phot) Jay Allen]

Gustav, which has already caused damage and loss of life in Haiti, is now south of Jamaica and threatening a number of other Caribbean nations. Part of Iron Duke's role in the region requires her to be on alert, ready to provide humanitarian assistance in the event of a hurricane causing damage ashore. Iron Duke is now working closely with Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) Ship Wave Ruler; between them, they are able to deploy numerous First Aid teams ashore, provide water and food, along with engineering support if required by any UK Overseas Territory in the region. Importantly the Royal Navy and RFA personnel are available for that initial period after the hurricane has hit, to provide relief and assistance to get local infrastructure and vital services back up and running.

HMS Iron Duke's Captain, Commander Mark Newland, said:

"At the moment we are tracking Gustav closely and sat 24 hours behind the storm itself. Both my own and Wave Ruler's ship's companies are ready to provide assistance ashore if we are required by the Overseas Territories."



Iron Duke's command team make preparations should Hurricane Gustav hit one of the UK Overseas Territories in the Caribbean region [Picture: LA (Phot) Jay Allen]

Cdr Newland explained how it would work on the ground if the hurricane hit: "The key issue is that Royal Navy personnel must work in support of the local efforts on the ground. The true expertise for dealing with these events lies in the Overseas Territories themselves. What we bring is a range of skills coupled with professional and motivated sailors, who if faced with difficult circumstances, are able to assist."

HMS Iron Duke has been deployed to the Caribbean region since late June 2008 and has been involved in counter narcotics work with the US Coastguard alongside providing reassurance to the UK Overseas Territories. Prince William recently spent a few weeks assisting on the ship.

During her recent patrols, Iron Duke has tested these skills, participating in a disaster relief exercise on the island of Montserrat. First Aid Teams, including the ship's doctor, and engineering support were all sent ashore to assist the islanders.

The ship's Lynx Mk 3 helicopter and Command Team were also extensively involved in the exercise. With an extensive communications suite herself, the ship is also a valuable asset if facilities ashore are damaged.