



THE UNIVERSITY  
OF THE  
WEST INDIES

# POLICY BRIEF

## Post-Melissa Guidelines for Builders, Contractors and Professionals in the Construction Industry

No. 5 - December 11, 2025

Julia Bonner Douett. MBA, PMP, BH(M)



### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The cost of rebuilding the infrastructure in hurricane ravaged parishes in Jamaica, namely Saint Elizabeth, Westmoreland and the parts Hanover and Trelawney have been reported to be over 9 billion U.S. dollars, including road infrastructure, agriculture and residential and non - residential structures. However, with every tragedy there is an opportunity. The Jamaica Building Codes were developed through funding from the Jamaican government by Engineers and technical experts associated with the Jamaica Institute of Engineers, JIE and other such entities. The codes are fashioned based the International Code Council reference documents and were revised through the Bureau of Standards Jamaica to improve Jamaica's resilience in the face of a natural disaster such as Melissa.

### INTRODUCTION

- Hurricane Melissa made landfall in Jamaica as a catastrophic Category 5 storm on October 28, 2025, causing unprecedented destruction.
- There is a total of 11 building codes, seven of which are fully published and the other four are smaller documents not yet published (older versions) that refer to specific subject matter areas.
- The published codes are available for viewing and reading free of charge on the ICC website: [Codes.ICCsafe.org/codes/global/ja](https://Codes.ICCsafe.org/codes/global/ja).
- On this site in the search bar, type Jamaica to view the 7 published codes. Choose the code you would want to read and the chapters of interest.
- Nevertheless, both the seven published documents and the four older 2009 versions (existing as application documents to the ICC base codes) are also available have the Bureau of Standards Library.

# POLICY BRIEF

## Post-Melissa Guidelines for Builders, Contractors and Professionals in the Construction Industry

### MAKING THE CASE

A category 5 hurricane such as Melissa would have caused significant damage to almost any infrastructure. However, pictures of the devastation in West showed that some structures managed to withstand fury of Melissa. In these cases, some roofs were gone, but most of the physical base building remains. The 11 codes that continue to guide Jamaica's construction sector are:

- 1. Jamaican Building Codes JBC- the parent document that covers general requirements for construction and to which all other codes make reference
- 2. Existing Building Code for retrofitting of and making additions to old buildings
- 3. Small Building/Residential Code - for all buildings up to 300 m<sup>2</sup> similar requirements to the JBC and include requirements for slab roofs.
- 4. Fire Code - details requirement for fire safety measures including clearance for occupancy administered by the Jamaica Fire Brigade
- 5. Maintenance code- -for maintaining existing building structures and facilitating repairs
- 6. Mechanical code for installation and performance of which vaccine systems heating systems on other such devices in a building
- 7. Energy Conservation code -providing guidance for creating energy-efficiency spaces and for installation and use of devices such as air conditioners
- 8. Plumbing code for installation of systems in both residential and commercial buildings
- 9. Private sewage code - provision for the installation and disposal of sewage systems
- 10. Fuel Gas Code- -Requirements for safe installation and performance of fuel gas systems such as appliances, piping and accessories for cooking
- 11. Electrical Code - Requirements for electrical wiring of buildings and equipment.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In rebuilding ensure compliance to the codes. The following are critical and are applicable as short-term to long-term interventions:

- Foundations of residential and commercial buildings must be in compliance with the requirements of the code.
- Steel structure has been designed by professionals.
- Columns and beams structures must be so tied together to reinforce the building.
- Blocks used in construction must be compliant the Jamaican standard for hollow concrete blocks JS 35 2022, and have compressive strength of 7Mpa.
- Aggregates used must also comply with standards JS124 for concrete aggregates.
- Roofs must be installed and reinforced using hurricane straps and where possible screws instead of nails

These codes are referenced in the Building Act of 2018 and monitored through the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development therefore in building, also seek guidance from the Municipalities and associated local authorities.

\* Short-term (0–6 months); \*\*Medium-term (6–18 months); \*\*\*Long-term (18+ months)

### CONCLUSIONS

The resilience of our national physical infrastructure is key to maintaining the gains in Jamaica economic growth. The perception and belief of hope and the possibility of greatness is foundational to the resilience of our people.