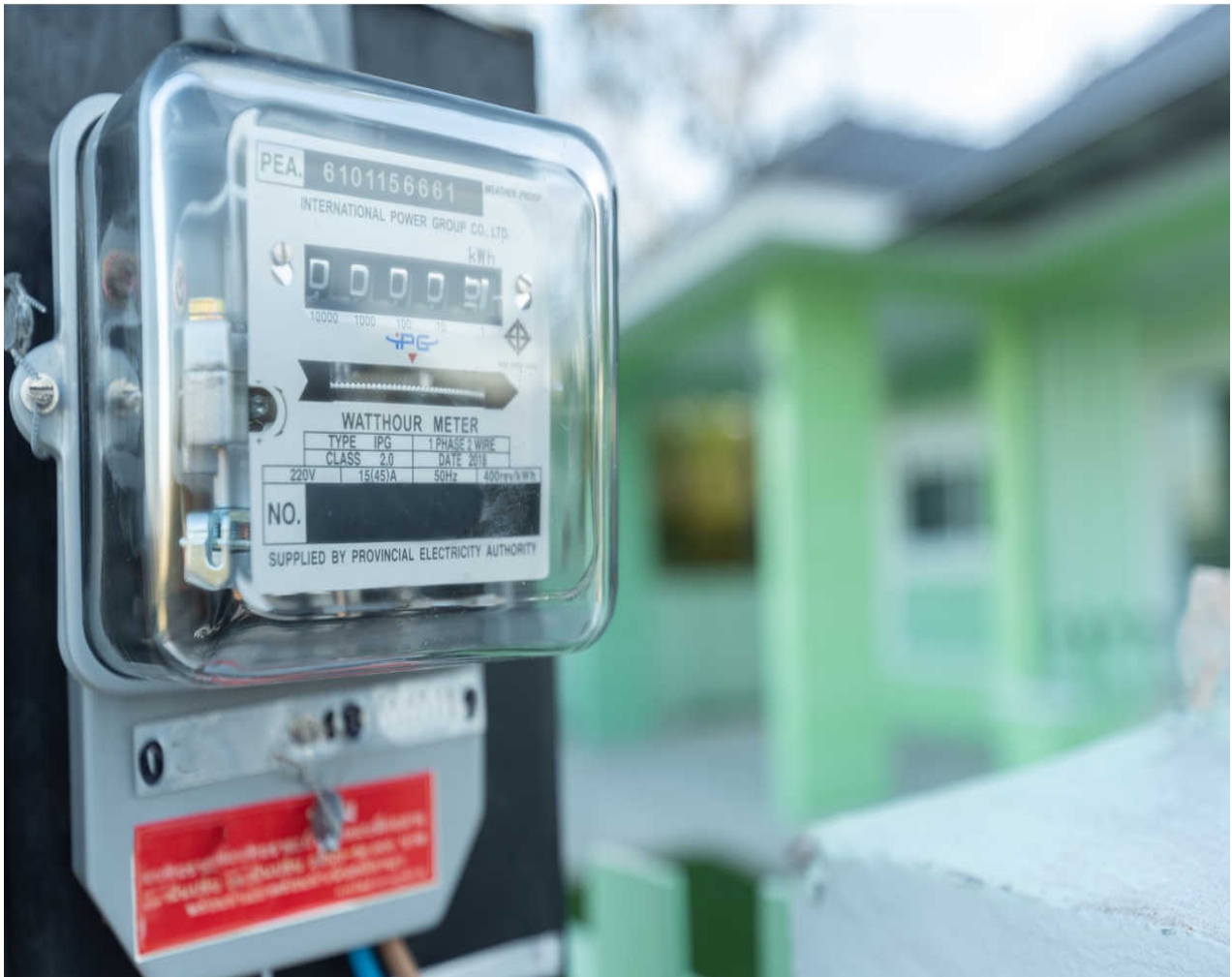


The Virgin Islands Consortium

In Setback For Customers, Manual Meter Readings Increase as WAPA's AMI System Continues to Decline

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The V.I. Water & Power Authority's automated metering infrastructure (AMI) is the utility's "lifeline to its customers," according to WAPA CEO Andrew Smith. But that lifeline is badly frayed and continues to deteriorate despite the company's best efforts.

WAPA officials, testifying before the Senate Committee on Disaster Recovery, Infrastructure and Planning on Thursday, reminded lawmakers that the deployment of AMI was almost completed across the territory when Hurricanes Irma and Maria struck. "Since 2017, the authority has been steadfast in its efforts to return the system to pre-storm condition, however, the system continues to decline," said Ashley Bryan, WAPA's interim chief operating officer for electric.

Prior to the storms, approximately 90 percent of meter reads were being done via the AMI. In mid-May, WAPA reported to the Public Services Commission that the system had a [read rate](#) of just over 60 percent, far below the industry standard of 99 percent for functional AMI systems. During Thursday's hearing, Senator Alma Francis Heyliger said she was made aware about two months ago that the read rate stood at a paltry 55 percent. She asked whether any improvements had been made since then.

There is an application in with the Federal Emergency Management Agency for a prudent replacement of the entire system, Mr. Smith told lawmakers. Ms. Bryan said that in addition to work on the FEMA application, WAPA was also pursuing a "parallel path" of contracting a third-party service provider to manage the deployment and operation of a new AMI. In the interim, manual meter readings have increased.

Having functional automated metering infrastructure would "greatly improve our billing practices, reduce expenses, as well as improve operational efficiency," according to Ms. Bryan. However, Senator Kenneth Gittens wanted to know what would become of the expense already incurred for the installation of the existing AMI system, which cost somewhere between \$12 - \$14 million. "Now we have to start over again. What are we doing to recoup the monies, if we're doing anything at all?" he asked.

WAPA cannot do anything at all to recover the millions laid to waste by hurricanes Irma and Maria. "There really is no provision for us to go back and try to claim monies from that provider," Mr. noted. "That's quite frankly not that different than most legacy contracts at WAPA, unfortunately."