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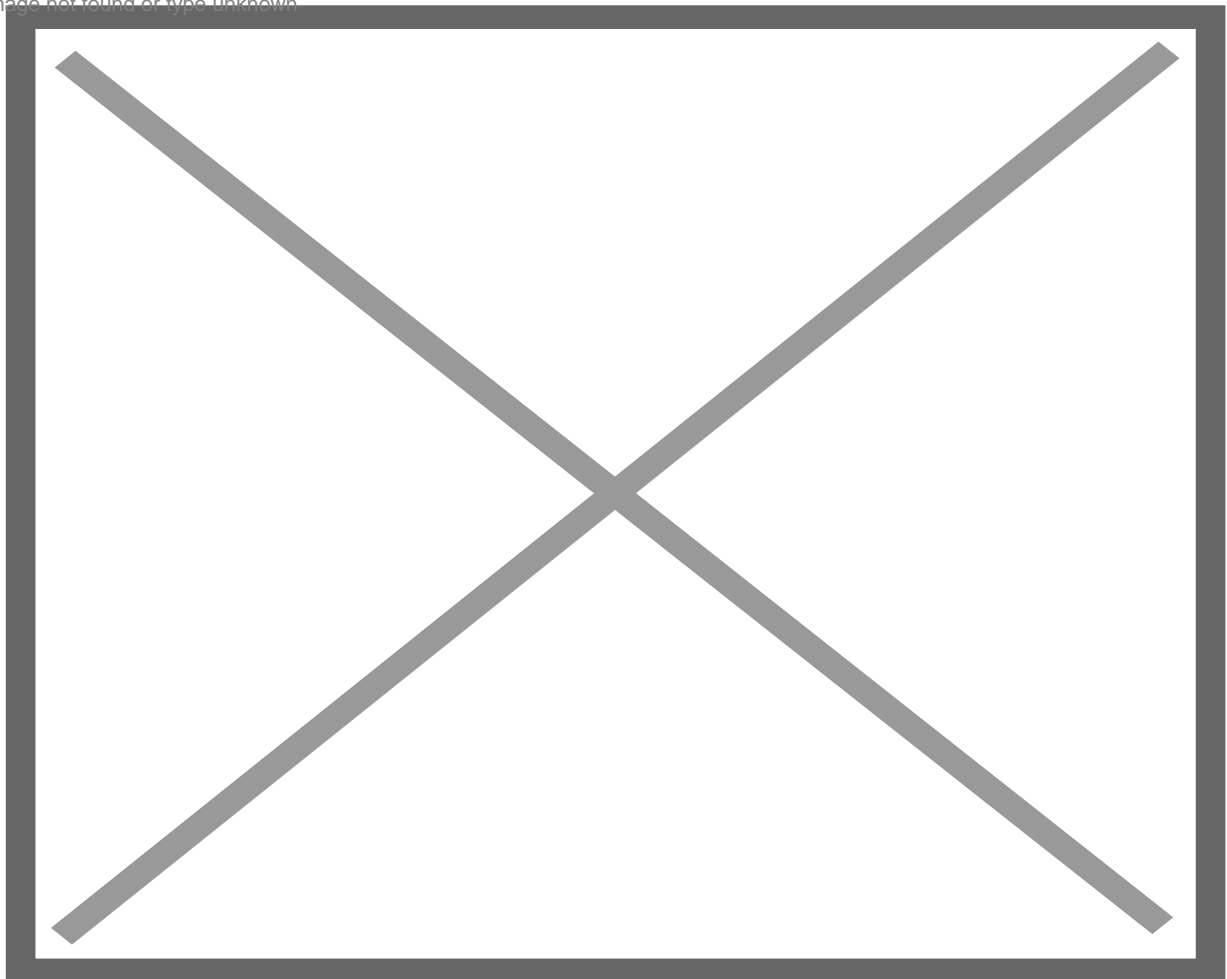
WAPA Struggles to Restore Power Following Cascade of Electrical Failures

First day of school cut short as island-wide blackout affects services

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WAPA's Richmond Powerplant. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

Water and Power officials are blaming an issue with one of the utility's propane pumps for triggering a cascade of events that resulted in the loss of electricity across St. Croix for the majority of Monday.

Children who turned up for the first school day of the year were sent home early, while businesses lacking backup generators had to close. The disruption even affected the government's ability to function, forcing the closure of some agencies including the Division of Personnel, and the postponement of the executive branch's first press briefing of 2024.

WAPA's initial public announcement was light on details, only acknowledging the "major electrical service interruption" following the "loss of generation capacity at the Estate Richmond Power Plant."

However, Consortium journalists understand that the faulty propane pump caused the first outage at 5:00 a.m., with a failed power restoration effort causing another system crash around 8:00 a.m. One of the transformers was found to be damaged, kicking off a whole-day effort to isolate the issue and bring feeders back online one by one.

Electricity on St. Croix was finally restored around 4:30 p.m., but several feeders lost power again during the nighttime. People familiar with the issue said WAPA, at one point, considered rotating power outages on the island.

The outage resurfaces longstanding questions about the reliability of St. Croix's electricity supply despite major investments in WAPA's energy infrastructure, given the ability of one faulty propane pump to take down the island's entire system for hours at a time.

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