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Damaged Underground Cables Blamed for Major Blackout on St. John; WAPA Apologizes to Customers

In a series of unfortunate events, the V.I. Water and Power Authority apologizes again after a massive outage disrupts life across St. John, emphasizing challenges with underground repairs

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Janeka Simon **May 28, 2024**

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WAPA CEO Andrew Smith

The V.I. Water and Power Authority has, again, issued an apology to customers following a massive blackout on the island of St. John, continuing the now commonplace action of begging for pardon following a [series of power outages and rotations.](#)

On Saturday, WAPA's Chief Executive Officer Andrew Smith uploaded a short statement following a failed live press conference on Friday. In his remarks, he assured consumers that the

authority knows the “extent of inconvenience and disruption that [outages] cause in the lives of Virgin Islanders.” Individuals, businesses, and essential services were all impacted by the islandwide blackout on St. John, but at the time of his uploaded statement, Mr. Smith noted that connectivity had been restored to the majority of ratepayers.

Last week’s power interruption resulted from a series of mishaps, Mr. Smith reported. An outage in the subsea cables connecting St. John to St. Thomas required repair crews to access the infrastructure to manholes that were inundated by recent rains. “Pumping those manholes out was further complicated by the fact that we were still having water runoff coming into the manholes,” WAPA’s CEO shared. The authority therefore resorted to barricading the manholes with sandbags to continue work.

Underground troubleshooting led to the discovery of two splices in WAPA’s cables. “Repairing a splice takes approximately four hours,” noted Mr. Smith, clarifying why reconnections can often be protracted. However, as soon as those two repair jobs on the underground cables were completed, one of the three power feeders on St. John failed. WAPA reported that most repair work was completed at 8:30 a.m. on Saturday.

Mr. Smith reminded listeners that WAPA is in the process of [undergrounding electric lines throughout the territory](#), including on St. John. It is a strategy predicated on the resilience of underground cables during storms and windy conditions. The “trade-off”, the CEO explained, is a “longer [repair] process than it would typically otherwise be if we had overhead lines.”

Amidst the territory’s power grid problems, the chair of WAPA’s governing board has encouraged the entity to develop strategies to push for the installation of [independent energy storage](#) in individual homes.