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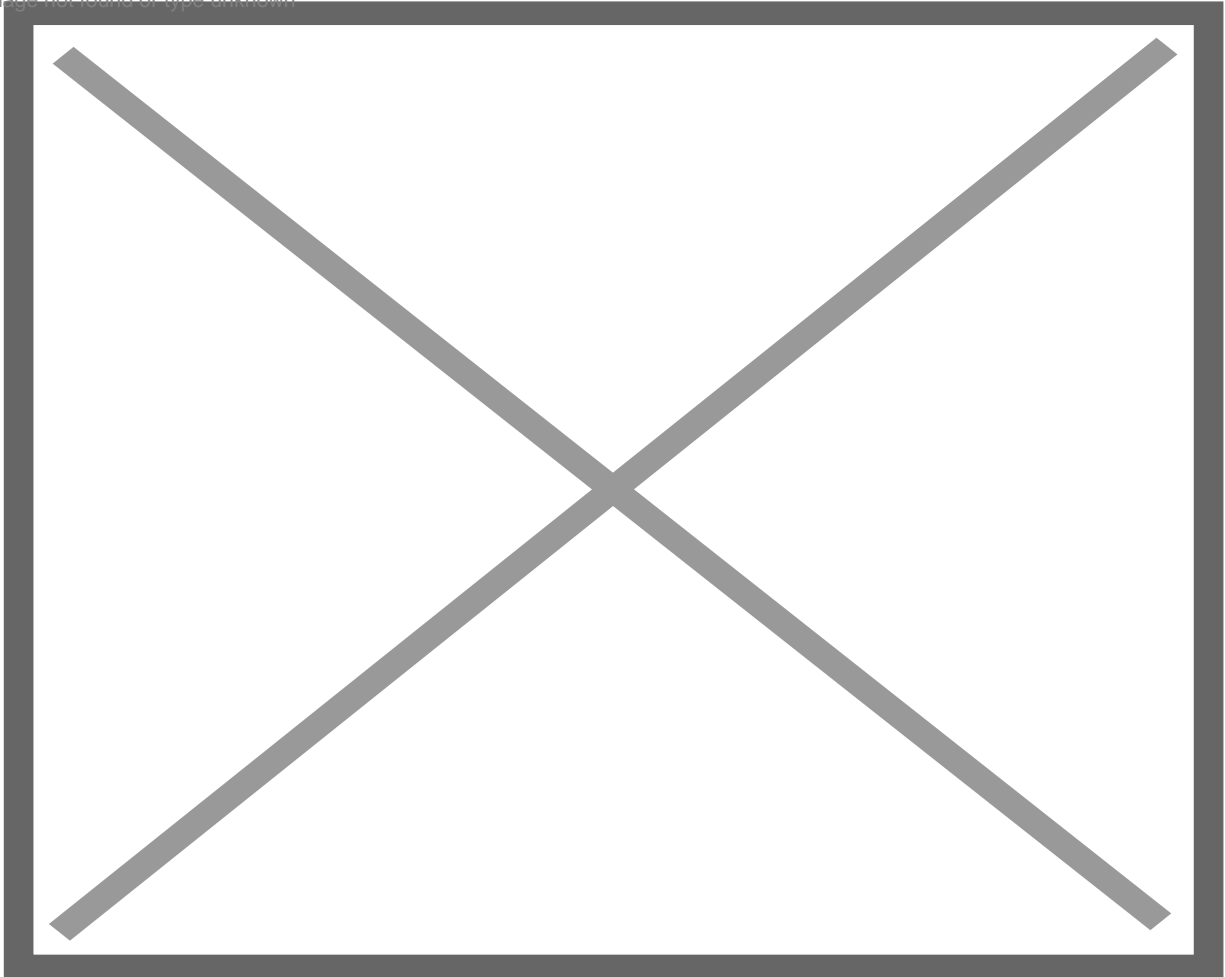
In Major Boost for USVI, Bryan Announces Up to \$600 Million in FEMA Funding to Replace St. Croix Power Plant and Upgrade St. Thomas Units

Governor Bryan announces a transformative \$600 million FEMA initiative to replace aging power units on St. Croix and St. Thomas, promising enhanced efficiency and sustainability

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An aerial shot of the Richmond Power Plant on St. Croix. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

In a surprise announcement on Wednesday, Governor Albert Bryan Jr. announced that the Federal Emergency Management Agency will be funding the wholesale replacement of the V.I. Water and Power Authority's Estate Richmond Power Plant on St. Croix, as well as several units on St.

Thomas.

At the start of the press briefing, the governor disclosed that he and other government officials received the news during a call with FEMA on Monday. The announcement is a beacon of hope for WAPA as it navigates through a sea of grid failures and power rotations caused by [damaged equipment, rough weather, and low fuel inventory](#).?

“We are already well on the way to fixing the St. Thomas plant,” Governor Bryan assured. “With this new addition being able to replace older units and damaged units on the island of St. Croix, it speeds us so much further ahead, in terms of not only reliability but affordability, because we’ll be able to purchase way more efficient units and put those units into service,” he explained.



The Randolph Harley Power Plant in St. Thomas (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, V.I. Consortium)

“What we’re looking at basically is – an updated power plant will allow us to have interconnections to allow for more renewable energy,” said Adrienne Williams-Octalien, director of the Office of Disaster Recovery. She noted that the approval comes four years after ODR and WAPA jointly submitted a prudent replacement request to FEMA, covering the St. Croix power plant and multiple generators at the Randolph Harley plant on St. Thomas.

Now that FEMA has greenlit the request, the two agencies will immediately begin “drafting solicitations and being able to get contracts and plans moving so that this is not a delayed process,” Ms. Williams-Octalien said, saying that costs, currently estimated at between \$400 and \$600 million, will have to be validated through FEMA’s costing center before funds are ultimately obligated. This part of the process will need to be completed before September, the ODR director explained, so as to take advantage of the current relaxed matching funds requirements for local government. “This is a tremendous opportunity for the Water and Power Authority,” said Ms. Williams-Octalien. “We want to ensure that we get this project started within the next 12 months.”

In the face of this unequivocally good news for St. Croix, for WAPA, and for the territory at large, the question arises of how the utility company, in the midst of a financial and management crisis, will be able to handle this boon. According to Governor Bryan, it is imperative that the agency’s staff and management be left to focus on ensuring that smaller projects – solar and wind farms, repairs to the undersea cable to St. John and building in redundancies to the power supply on that island – and others currently in progress, while this urgent, enormous initiative to rebuild the St. Croix power plant be rolled into the territory’s “total recovery” efforts, as part of one of the

billion-dollar Rebuild VI project packages to be parceled out to major contractors.?

Acknowledging that this is not a comprehensive solution to WAPA's myriad challenges, including delays of [several crucial projects](#), chair of the utility's governing board Kyle Fleming noted that the Incident Command Team, operating within the current state of emergency with respect to energy, has been making strides in tackling "the wide spectrum of issues that need to be addressed." The efforts of the multi-agency team have resulted in clearer communication of the issues occurring in real time, as well as a greater capacity for collective work on key pain points. "It really is a divide and conquer mentality," said Mr. Fleming. "And I think the incident command structure right now has added more team members to that collaboration so that way, the focus efforts can be aligned accordingly."

While officials work furiously to ensure that WAPA is successfully able to replace the Estate Richmond power plant on St. Croix, Governor Bryan has pledged unwavering interim support to the challenged agency as it seeks to achieve sustainable operations and a brighter energy future for the territory. "We got to do what we got to do to keep the power on," he declared.

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