

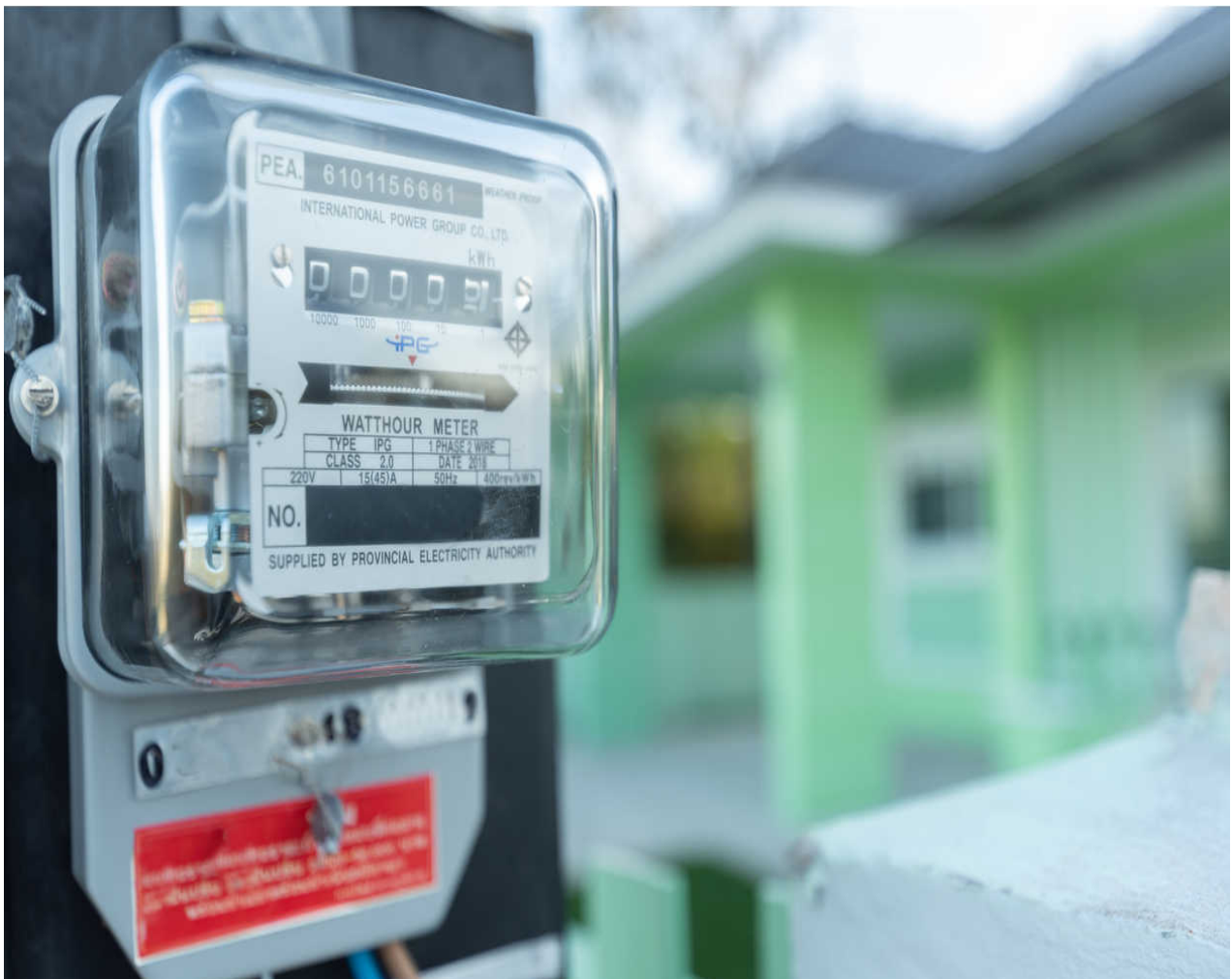
The Virgin Islands Consortium

Knight Blames Ignorance, Poor Technology, Hurricanes, on Smart Meter Failures

As FEMA funds a full smart meter replacement, WAPA CEO Karl Knight admits past procurement errors. WAPA is now vetting technology thoroughly, renegotiating contracts, and requiring vendors to be accountable for servicing and maintaining installed meters

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V.I. Water and Power Authority CEO Karl Knight has shed light on the missteps that plagued the agency's initial effort to install smart electricity meters across the U.S. Virgin Islands. Reflecting on the project's failures, Knight admitted, "We didn't know what we were looking for....We went with who sounded good."

Speaking on WSTX with Elizabeth Hansen Watley, Knight's remarks came in the wake of a sobering [report by Ernst & Young](#), WAPA's turnaround management company. The report described WAPA as operating "within the zone of insolvency" due to a deep-rooted structural deficit that remains difficult to resolve.

One of WAPA's longstanding issues is an unreliable metering and billing system, which Knight described as "erratic and all over the place." A widespread failure of smart meters, compounded by the 2017 hurricanes, has resulted in WAPA relying heavily on estimated billing—a practice that has frustrated customers and created financial inconsistencies.

While Knight attributes the failures to hurricane damage, an ongoing lawsuit presents a different perspective. The legal complaint alleges that WAPA officials and meter vendors were aware from the start that the devices were unsuitable for the Virgin Islands' environmental conditions, yet moved forward with the project anyway.

In response to the metering crisis, WAPA has begun replacing malfunctioning meters with manual meters and is actively seeking new meter readers to fill vacancies left when the agency transitioned to an automated system, Knight said.

Moving forward, Knight said WAPA plans to hold vendors accountable. "We need to sit with the company that provided us with the smart meters and basically tell them they need to solve this," he stated.

With the Federal Emergency Management Agency committing to fully fund a new metering system, WAPA is once again evaluating proposals for a smart meter replacement. However, this time, Knight emphasized a more thorough vetting process to avoid past mistakes. "We're taking our time and going through and vetting the technology a little bit more closely now," he said.

Acknowledging WAPA's past lack of knowledge in the first-generation smart meter procurement, Knight said the agency now has a better understanding of the technology and the contract terms necessary to ensure success. "This was first-generation technology, brand new to us," he explained.

The next contract, he assured, will include provisions to make vendors more responsible for servicing the meters they sell. Additionally, WAPA plans to renegotiate its existing contract to ensure that payments are only made for properly functioning meters that provide accurate readings.