

The Virgin Islands Consortium

WAPA Says Response Times Are Improving as St. Thomas Outages Persist and Maintenance Talks Continue

WAPA CEO Karl Knight told the Governing Board that while outages remain frequent, response times are shortening as Phase 2 Wärtsilä units operate and the utility works to resolve arrears and finalize a maintenance agreement with its vendor.

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The Randolph Harley Power Plant in St. Thomas. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM.

Persistent power outages on St. Thomas dominated part of Thursday's meeting of the V.I. Water and Power Authority Governing Board, as officials acknowledged ongoing disruptions while outlining steps they say are gradually improving response times and system reliability.

Despite continued outages, Karl Knight, WAPA's chief executive officer, told board members that the utility has been "getting better...in being able to respond and shorten the duration" of outages. Looking at performance over the course of a full year, Knight said, "When we look at the full totality of 365 days, I think we are starting to move in the right direction."

Knight reported that the Phase 2 Wärtsilä generating units are now online, after extended efforts to resolve warranty-related issues. "We spent a lot of time...working through the warranty issues to get them operating as promised," he explained.

However, Knight said complications arose because payments for maintenance on the original generators had fallen behind. As a result, Wärtsilä has been reluctant to enter into a new maintenance agreement that would also cover the newer units. "That kind of put the maintenance function a little bit in no man's land," Knight told the board.

He said WAPA is working to resolve the situation and that an agreement in principle has been reached on contract terms, though "some payment issues" still need to be addressed. Until a formal maintenance contract is finalized, WAPA staff are handling the maintenance work internally.

That interim arrangement presents challenges, Knight acknowledged, because "we have to source the spare parts and do certain things that would have been part of the contract." He added that the process "has taken us a lot longer than we had anticipated."

Even so, Knight expressed cautious optimism, saying he sees "some light at the end of the tunnel" as WAPA continues efforts to reconcile outstanding obligations with its vendor and stabilize maintenance operations.