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On the Ground in Jamaica, WAPA Linemen Trade Skills and Build Regional Resilience

Virgin Islands linemen deployed to Jamaica say working alongside crews from Jamaica, Saint Lucia, and Nevis has sharpened their skills, highlighted regional differences in power systems, and reinforced Caribbean mutual aid after hurricanes.

Community Center / **Published On January 26, 2026 06:14 AM /**

Janeke Simon **January 26, 2026**

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Members of the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority line crew are seen working alongside regional partners in Jamaica as part of a coordinated post-hurricane power restoration effort.

The V.I. Water and Power Authority line crew dispatched to Jamaica to assist in post-hurricane rebuilding are feeling good about their accomplishments thus far, as part of a Caribbean-wide

collaborative effort to restore the country's power grid.

Just over a week into their [month-long deployment](#), Consortium journalists spoke with crew supervisor Omari George, and linemen Rey Belardo Jr. and Luiscito Frederick about their experiences thus far.

The mostly-flat terrain they were currently working on was a welcome change from the steep hills of St. Thomas, which can pose a particular challenge. Otherwise, the team is enjoying the opportunity to exchange notes with their counterparts from Jamaica and elsewhere.

“JPS has their own style of construction,” said Mr. George, noting that the wires used by the Jamaica Power Service are of a significantly smaller gauge than what WAPA would employ for the same purpose. He explained that households in Jamaica typically consume less electricity than those in the Virgin Islands, and thus place less “load” on the system, making the smaller wires a sensible choice under those circumstances.

Apart from their Jamaican hosts, “we met with two different crews, the Saint Lucia team and the team from Nevis,” Mr. Belardo said. “Man, once you see them work you’ll be fascinated, even though you have that experience.” He was happy to observe the different techniques on display. “The benefit of it is you could always mix and match your skills and their skills and become a better lineman to restore the power for the people in Jamaica.” The skills exchange is mutual, he explained, with the other linemen also curious about how the Virgin Islanders perform their tasks.

The WAPA line crew is proud to be part of Jamaica's hurricane recovery and rebuilding efforts. “This is an honor for us being here,” Mr. Belardo declared, noting that as Virgin Islanders they are all too familiar with the devastation that follows a direct hit by a powerful storm. “We know the feeling of the people.” Support in the region is circular, he noted. “Some of those countries, also the mainland, came to help us. So we would like to also help back others, especially in the whole Caribbean.” He noted that he and Mr. Frederick had been deployed to Anguilla in 2014 and The Bahamas in 2022, and congratulated the Caribbean Electric Utility Services Corporation (CARILEC) for establishing the mutual support program “that will keep all of us as one.”

Apart from the core work being done to help restore Jamaica's power grid, the line crew appreciates the opportunity to gain perspective from operating in a different environment. Mr. George said he appreciated the hardworking, industrious nature of the people around him. “Everyone has a hustle here, and they appreciate us helping them out...I just want to comment on the resilience of the people.”

Mr. Belardo thanked Virgin Islanders back home for their love and support. “We’re going to come back safely to our family, friends and the community,” he assured, noting that the experience in Jamaica will leave the team “more ready for anything to come in the future.”