

WAPA Warns More Rotating Outages Possible During St. Thomas Valve Repairs; Joseph Calls Disruptions “Torture”

Sen. Carla Joseph called St. Thomas outages, including planned disruptions, “torture” as WAPA prepared for five more hours of propane-valve work. Karl Knight warned the district remains in a “very tender capacity situation” until more generation is added.

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

ST. THOMAS — St. Thomas could face additional rotating power outages as the V.I. Water and Power Authority completes repairs to a critical valve at its propane terminal, with Executive

Director Karl Knight warning that the district will remain in a precarious generation position until additional power resources are brought online.

The warning came Wednesday as Sen. Carla Joseph described the repeated outages affecting St. Thomas, including planned disruptions, as “torture.”

Knight told Joseph that WAPA needed “another five hours engagement tonight.” to complete the valve work, which had been scheduled during nighttime hours, apparently to reduce the effect on daytime business activity.

The authority had expected to operate the electrical system solely on diesel while shutting down the propane component for the repairs, allowing customers to remain connected throughout the work.

That did not happen during the first phase.

High Demand Forced Power Rotations

Knight said electricity demand was particularly high Tuesday night, forcing WAPA to implement rotating outages while the propane system was unavailable.

Hot nighttime temperatures have increased air-conditioning use, adding pressure to an already constrained electrical system.

“The demand {on Tuesday] night was particularly high, and that forced us to rotate power between those hours when we were working on the valve,” he explained to Sen. Joseph.

Knight warned that rotations could again become necessary during Wednesday night’s work, although he said any interruptions would be “no longer than two hours for those affected.”

Joseph, speaking about conditions faced by St. Thomas residents, told the WAPA executive director that “we are suffering.”

Knight acknowledged the severity of the generation constraints and cautioned that the situation will not be fully resolved by completing the valve repair.

Until supplemental generation is incorporated into the system, he said, “we’re going to be at a very tender capacity situation in St. Thomas, and that’s just the reality.”

WAPA Looks to Solar and Additional Generation

The authority’s plans for increasing available generation include incorporating solar power from farms on St. Thomas and installing additional generators on St. John.

Knight maintained that WAPA must continue performing necessary maintenance despite the possibility of service interruptions.

“We have to do maintenance. We can’t defer it. It’s better we schedule it and plan it than to do what it did to us the other night when it failed, without us being able to plan accordingly,” he said.

He attributed the current condition of the system to “years of deferred maintenance” and “some poor regulatory decisions that have left the authority with less than adequate resources to keep up with its maintenance requirements.”

Knight also reminded Joseph that “the plant that I inherited was in a bad state.”

The propane-terminal valve work is part of WAPA’s effort to address that accumulated maintenance burden.

“When we're done, we'll have a new valve [and] hopefully, we won't have a reoccurrence of this anytime soon,” Mr. Knight promised.

For customers in the St. Thomas-St. John District, however, Knight made clear that completion of the repair will not immediately eliminate the broader generation constraints. Until supplemental power resources are installed, WAPA expects the St. Thomas system to continue operating with limited capacity.