

The Virgin Islands Consortium

WAPA To Allow Pay As You Go Method, Automatic Meter Reading Installs To Be Completed By End Of 2015

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Ernice Gilbert **April 27, 2015**

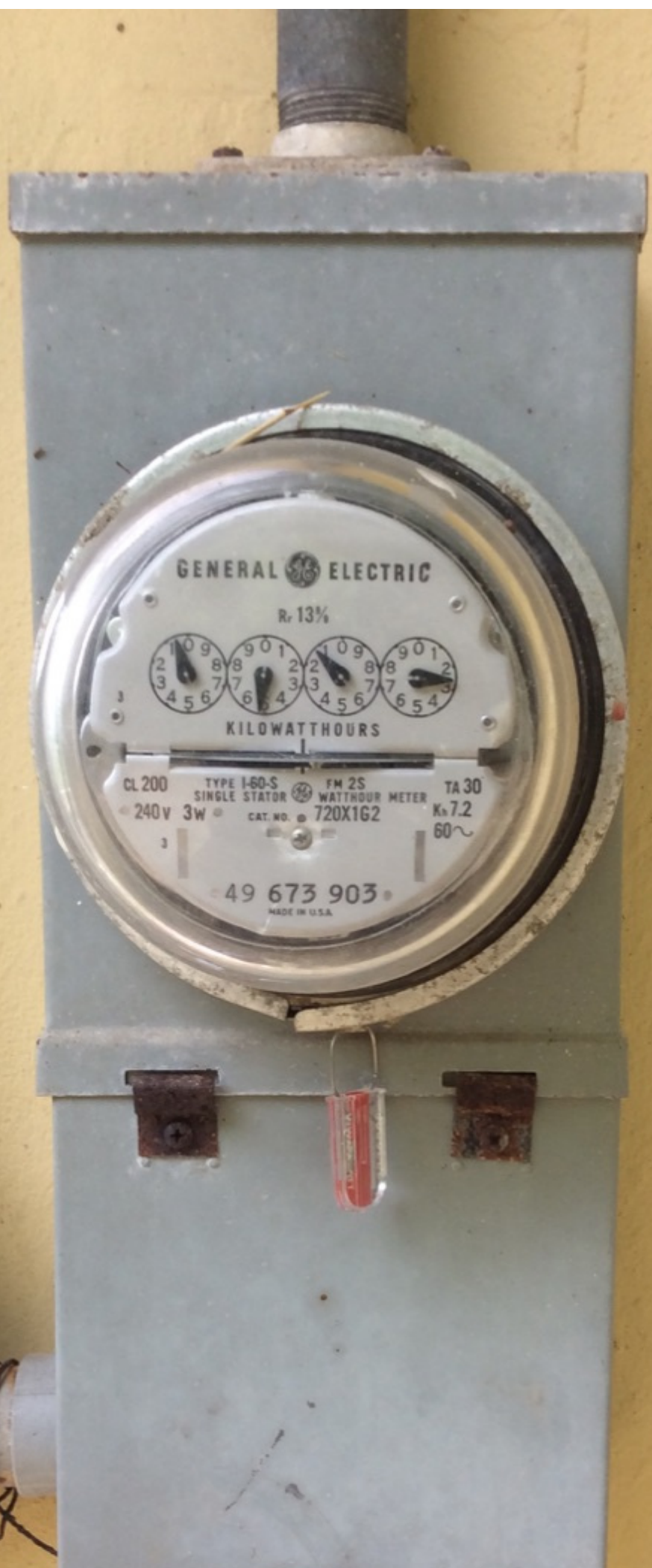


ST. CROIX -- Officials of the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (WAPA) gathered at the company's Sunny Isle conference room on Thursday, April 23 to update the media on progress made on a myriad of projects, and to dispel certain misconceptions about WAPA's Advance Metering Infrastructure (AMI), according to Hugo Hodge, Jr., chief executive of the semi-autonomous entity.

On the AMI project, Glenfield Jarvis, electrical engineer at WAPA, detailed the benefits of its implementation and said that about 20,000 customers on St. Thomas were already

using the new system. St. John and St. Croix were next in line, Hodge said, with Jarvis adding that the full adaptation should be completed by the end of 2015, as the process on St. John and St. Croix should happen much quicker because of the experience gained during the installation process on St. Thomas.





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TYPE 1-60-S

SINGLE STATOR

FM 2S

WATTHOUR METER

TA 30

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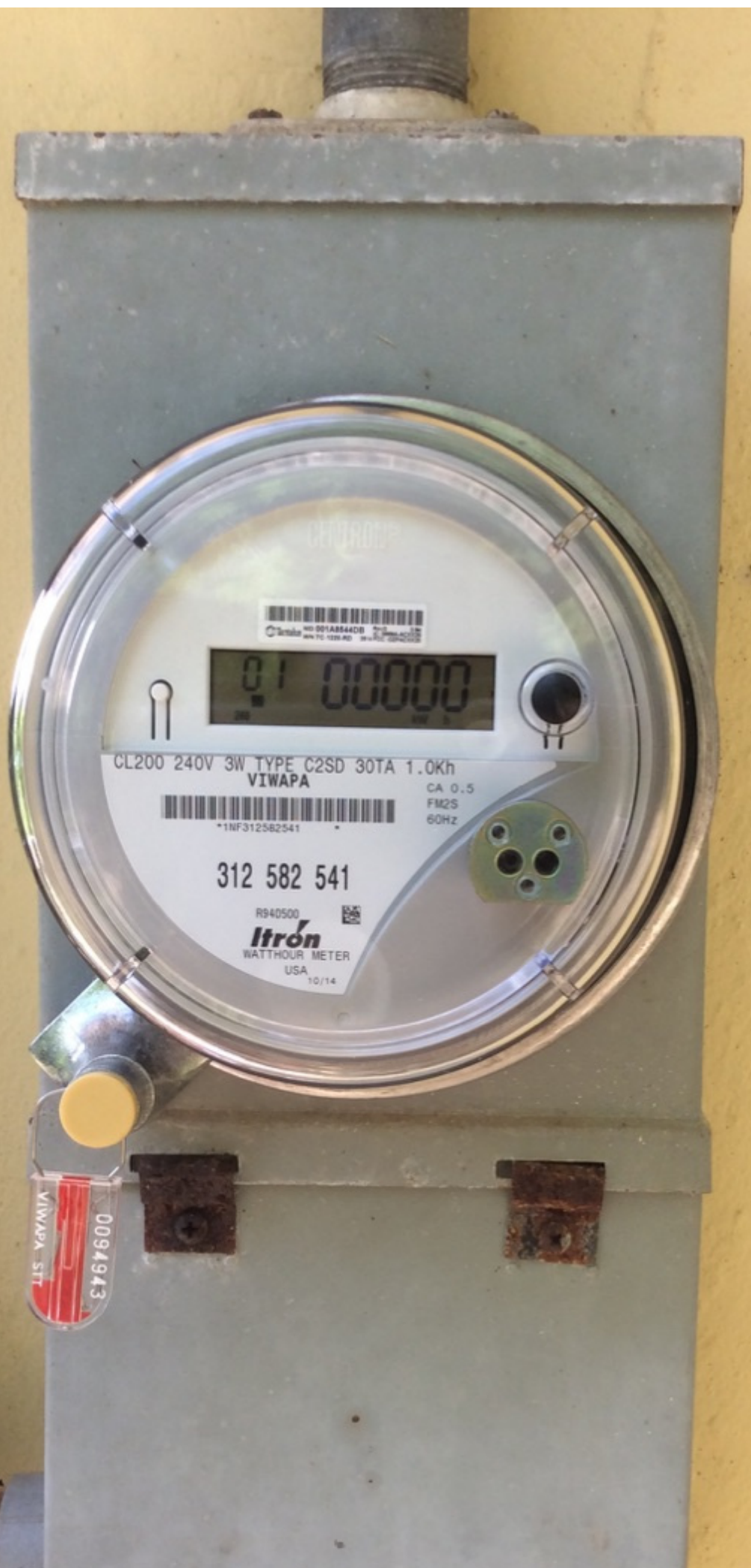
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MADE IN U.S.A.



The AMI is "an automated system where the meters connect with multiple collectors around the islands and those collectors relay the data to our data collection centers around the island, and the data is then transferred to our network and harvested for billing and monitoring purposes," Jarvis said.

Jarvis added that the new system will "revolutionize" WAPA's billing process and make way for innovative projects the company has in the pipeline.

Of the new projects, one of the most standout offerings will be the ability for customers to subscribe to a pay-as-you-go plan. According to WAPA officials, because the system is so technologically advanced, customers will have the option to pay for any amount of power they want to consume -- by the week, fortnight or month -- or even for a day.

Taking the technological advancements even further, the company's officials said part of the plan is to make kiosks available throughout the islands, giving customers the convenience of paying their bills on the go.

While these upgrades seem like a far away dream from a company that charges its customers some of the highest utility rates in the U.S., with aging equipment and an outdated infrastructure, WAPA has teamed up with reputable companies with decades of experience in their respective field to see the project through.

For example, meters for the AMI are being provided by [Itron](#), a company that was established in 1972 and has been recognized for delivering quality products and leadership.

The technology behind the new software upgrades is being supplied by [Tantalus Corporation's](#) Tantalus Utility Network arm. According to a blurb on the company's website, Tantalus Utility "is Smart Grid technology that enables a utility to monitor, control and respond to events anywhere and at any time across its distribution network. It serves as the communications backbone that makes Smart Metering, Power Quality Monitoring, Outage Reporting, Load Control, and Distribution Automation practical and cost effective. The result is more efficient operations, more accurate billing, and the ability for a utility to deliver a high level of customer service."

The AMI will not only be applied to WAPA's electric service, but also to the company's water business. However, the AMI water upgrades will be realized only after the full deployment of the AMI to the firm's electric arm.

"Because of AMI, we've had to expand our network as far as fiber access," Jarvis said. "That fiber will be used to automate different electrical devices as well as water devices, as well as the way they work in conjunction with each other."

Dispelling what WAPA says are rumors about the AMI project, Jarvis said the new meters use less than 1 percent of the radiation level approved by the FCC -- far less than cellphones, walkie-talkies and routers used at homes. And concerns that the system could be hacked and used to glean the private information of customers, Jarvis said the new meters use military grade encryption that's far more secure than what's used commercially.

He also retired a rumor that claimed the new meters were a means through which WAPA would overcharge its customers, and said residents who try to outsmart the AMIs wouldn't be successful because of how they store information.

With all these forward-looking approaches, *VI Consortium* asked Hodge whether the company would have to downsize, since it would no longer need men to check meters, as well as other tasks which will soon be performed by machines.

Hodge, however, said the company had already seen a decrease of its workforce from 660 to around 612 employees since he became chief executive, and that if there's to be any further downsizing, it would be a gradual process.

"To answer your question, yes and no," Hodge said. "We won't send anybody home, but what we will do is, through attrition, there are certain positions that we will hold open to transition people whose jobs are no longer viable."

Hodge pointed to meter reading as an example where field workers will no longer be needed. However, Hodge said WAPA will "transition those [employees] to other vacancies in the authority."

The CEO said WAPA is becoming more efficient not only through the AMI project, but also the Propane Conversion effort as well, along with the company's Reverse Osmosis water project.

The AMI program is 95 percent complete on St. Thomas with work on St. John soon to commence. While work is ongoing on St. John, WAPA will transfer some of the workforce from St. Thomas to St. Croix in an effort to realize the AMI installation's completion date of December, 2015 or sooner.

On St. Croix, WAPA ran a pilot program in Estate Profit where 210 AMIs were installed.

Feature Image: Example of pay as you go machine