

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Energy Savings Coming To St. Croix By Mid-July As Army Corps Of Engineers Issues Final Major Permit To WAPA

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ST. CROIX -- The Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority received the much-sought-after permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), which WAPA filed for in December of 2013, that gives the semi-autonomous entity the authority to move ahead with marine work at the Richmond, Christiansted plant to both receive and utilize liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) to generate power.

The news was made known via a press release issued this afternoon by WAPA, which included comments from the firm's Executive Director, Hugo Hodge, Jr., who said the

permit clears the way for propane delivery to the plant in the next 30-45 days.

"All components of the marine work that had been dependent on the permit approval will now move forward," Hodge said. "Some of the work to be done includes: an upgrade to the Authority's firewater protection systems; the placement of a turning dolphin to aid in navigation and maneuverability of the fuel feeder vessels; minor dredging at the fuel dock and the installation of fendering devices along the sea side of the fuel dock."

The completion of this major conversion to LPG instead of fuel oil in the generation of electricity will represent significant savings for all of WAPA's customers.

Hodge revealed that the permit was issued on May 8 and received by WAPA on May 13. The USACE tied about 24 conditions to the permit, however, Hodge said the stipulations are consistent "with what we expected given the scope of work to be done."

Gregory L. Rhymer, chief operating officer at WAPA, said Orion, the contractor in charge of the conversion, will arrive on St. Croix by the end of May.

"A nitrogen generator will arrive this week and in June, we will commence hydro testing and nitrogen purging of the various systems; the control room will be energized on June 1st and the automation systems will be loaded and tested in June as well," Rhymer said.

Rhymer said that over the next two weeks, various vendors will be arriving on island to complete the pre-commissioning of various equipment; the installation of emergency diesel generators and electrical cabinets as well as testing of the marine loading arm that was installed on the Richmond plant fuel dock about five weeks ago.

Hodge added that a large gas carrier will be loading LPG in the latter part of June for its journey to the Virgin Islands with the initial shipment of propane.

"We anticipate that the large gas carrier will arrive in the first days of July. It must be pointed out that given the fact that gas carrier's permanent mooring site is tied to pending Army Corps of Engineers permit for St. Thomas, we are pursuing a temporary anchoring site for the vessel. Our success in identifying the anchoring area for the gas carrier will ensure the flow of propane fuel to the Estate Richmond power plant by mid-July as scheduled," he said.

Additionally, Hodge revealed that one of the two custom-built fuel feeder vessels will also arrive in early July and will provide propane fuel supply to the Estate Richmond Power Plant. Significant familiarity training will also be provided to V.I. Port Authority marine pilots on the operation and handling of the feeder vessel, according to the press release.

Hodge noted that based on the permit issued by the USACE and the schedule of work that exists, he anticipates propane will be introduced to the Richmond Power Plant on St. Croix by mid-July for equipment commissioning purposes, and that the lower cost LPG will be used to generate electricity immediately thereafter.

WAPA said the completion of this major conversion to LPG instead of fuel oil in the generation of electricity will represent significant savings for all of its customers.

A similar permit application for the St. Thomas propane facility remains under review and consideration by the Army Corps. Hodge is hoping USACE moves quickly there as well.

"We trust that all agencies involved in the review process for the St. Thomas Army Corps permit will continue to work diligently to facilitate WAPA's receiving this permit required for the project to move forward without delay," he said.

In closing, both Hodge and Rhymer expressed gratitude to WAPA's board for their unwavering dedication, and to Governor Kenneth Mapp and Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett, for their efforts in reaching out to USACE, realizing the mammoth impact the LPG project will have on the territory's economy, and WAPA customers.

Feature Image: Newly installed marine loading arm sits on the Estate Richmond Power Plant fuel dock awaiting the initial shipment of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) to the territory. A marine loading arm is a device consisting of articulated steel pipes that connect a tank ship such as an oil tanker to a cargo terminal. WAPA is completing a conversion from fuel oil to propane as the primary source of fuel in the generation of electricity territory-wide.

Image Credit: WAPA