

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Copper Wire Stolen from WAPA Street Lights on St. Croix's Melvin Evans Highway

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ST. CROIX -- Early Tuesday morning, the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (WAPA) was notified that a string of street lights along the western lane of St. Croix's Melvin Evans Highway, between Williams Delight and Carlton, had been vandalized, a press release WAPA issued late Tuesday revealed. According to the release, copper thieves broke into the conduit along a 200ft run and made off with over 600 feet of wire from the highway's street lighting system.

"This is extremely costly to the Authority, and presents a hazard to motorists who travel the highway nightly," said Gregory Rhymer, WAPA's Acting CEO, adding that the cost of repairs must ultimately be passed on to WAPA customers.

The damage to the riser pole conduit, cables and locks by those persons seeking money for metal not only makes navigating the area hazardous for motorists and potential pedestrians, but it forces the Authority to now search for internal funds to replace the damaged installations. "This is an ongoing problem we face," Rhymer said, "and until we are able to source and rewire these conduits, that area will remain without adequate lighting.

The Virgin Islands Police Department has launched an investigation into this recent theft from the highway's street light system, and all persons found guilty of the theft of any part of the Authority's infrastructure will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Cutting and stealing power lines is a criminal act that carries very stiff consequences, which can include loss of limbs or life from electrocution. It is extremely dangerous.

Anyone with information about the theft of copper wire from WAPA facilities should report what they know to the VIPD, or to WAPA's Internal Audit Revenue Assurance Division at 340-715-6563 or can email to: reportservicetheft@viwapa.vi. Anonymous reports can also be made by contacting Crimestoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS (8477) or www.crimstoppersusvi.org, Hodge concluded.