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BVI Electric Corporation Says it Asked for and Received Materials From WAPA After Hurricanes Irma and Maria; Documents Showing Nature of Transfer Not Provided

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Aerial shot of the WAPA Christiansted plant on St. Croix By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI CONSORTIUM

The BVI Electric Corporation (BVIEC) has provided a statement to the Consortium that seeks to "defend the integrity" of BVIEC and the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority, and to "stand in support" of WAPA, in response to a Consortium article published in March which cited a [lawsuit](#) filed against the authority alleging that [WAPA management illegally shipped FEMA-provided restoration materials](#) and supplies to the British Virgin Islands — even as FEMA-

provided resources for the territory's rebuild after Hurricanes Irma and Maria were not approved for non-U.S. jurisdictions.

In its response, BVIEC did not deny it received materials from WAPA following the 2017 storms. Instead, the electric company said WAPA did provide materials after being asked, but that WAPA also asked for aid from BVIEC and was provided with relief.

Neither BVIEC or WAPA has provided documentation that would confirm the nature of the exchange.

"Following the historic devastating hurricanes of 2017 which significantly affected the electrical infrastructure of both the BVI and USVI, BVIEC requested WAPA's assistance in supplying it with various materials which were in their possession and needed urgently by BVIEC for the purpose of rebuilding the national electrical infrastructure," wrote BVIEC in its response to the Consortium article. "However, the situation was reciprocal as WAPA also requested certain materials to assist them with their recovery and they were supplied similarly without hesitation by BVIEC."

According to the lawsuit, which was brought against the authority by WAPA employee and current Chief Administration Officer, Rupert Pelle, Mr. Pelle invited WAPA upper echelon's ire when he sought information on the shipment of materials provided to the U.S. Virgin Islands by FEMA being shipped to the BVI. At the time Julio Rhymer, Gregory Rhymer's cousin, was executive director/CEO of WAPA.

Mr. Pelle requested information as to why the supplies were being shipped to the BVI, and whether they had been paid for, the suit says, adding that Mr. Pelle did not receive a response. "Upon information, Gregory Rhymer and other management employees were involved in this illegal transfer," the lawsuit reads.

In a release issued following the Consortium story in March, WAPA Executive Director Lawrence Kupfer pushed back against the allegation. He said an emergency request was made by the BVI to WAPA for poles, pole hardware, and wire for their distribution system which had been impacted by Hurricanes Irma and Maria. The release goes on to say that "based on all information that has been gathered," the materials shipped to the BVI was owned by WAPA.

BVIEC concurred with the WAPA executive director. "BVIEC fully endorses the statements made by WAPA's CEO Mr. Lawrence Kupfer in the Virgin Islands Consortium article published on March 11, 2020... The leadership of WAPA at the time thought it prudent to assist citizens in the BVI in their greatest time of need. This is not the first time that WAPA has assisted a fellow utility or received assistance during its recovery. Power companies not only exchange materials, manpower is also frequently provided to assist restoration efforts," BVIEC said.

BVIEC said it would do the same thing if presented with a similar problem in the future. "For one to now characterize such actions as being malicious or sinister is truly disappointing and a total misrepresentation of the facts. Further for the record, should a similar situation as what occurred in 2017 re-occur, BVIEC would not do anything differently by rendering its assistance," the BVI power company said.

