

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Starting In July, W.A.P.A. Will Disconnect 'Delinquent Accounts' At 6:30 A.M.

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ST. CROIX -- The Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority on Monday announced that come July 5, it will start disconnecting delinquent accounts at 6:30 a.m., as compared to the late morning disconnections the semiautonomous entity has been conducting for years.

The move, W.A.P.A. says, is part of its ongoing efforts to fully implement various components of its Automated Metering Infrastructure or AMI System. But the new policy means residents who are strapped for cash will no longer have the luxury of a last-ditch attempt to pay their bills before disconnection occurs. And it could become a frustration to families trying to prepare for the day ahead -- children to school and parents to work.

But W.A.P.A.'s Interim Director Julio Rhymer, Sr. sees the move as giving residents enough time in the day to work on restoring their service.

"The morning disconnects provide ample opportunity for customers to make payment arrangements during the authority's business office operating hours, to have their electrical service restored," Mr. Rhymer said. The acting C.E.O. said that disconnections currently occur at the end of the day, but that is misleading. The Consortium knows of a customer who has had their power cutoff more than five times, and it has always happened late morning or early afternoon, and not at the end of day as Mr. Rhymer suggests.

Mr. Rhymer added that since disconnection dates vary by cycle and route, customers are urged to pay particular attention to all W.A.P.A. bills and disconnection notices to avoid service interruptions.

In late 2014, WAPA deployed the [AMI system](#) in the St. Thomas/St. John district. The system's communication equipment was installed, and AMI towers were erected and commissioned to begin relaying data collected from customer smart meters to the authority's facilities. W.A.P.A. began the initial build out of AMI on St. Croix in mid-2015 and are now 75% complete with the installation of smart meters and have received authorization to install the final tower needed for data relay.

One component of the AMI system is the Automatic Meter Reading (AMR) program. The new smart meter has the ability to record the consumption data and communicate it directly to W.A.P.A.'s communication center. W.A.P.A. says the AMR program advances its ability to obtain billing information based on the recorded information from the smart meter, and allows customer service representatives to have access to real-time customer account information.

Once fully implemented, the AMI system will serve to reduce meter tampering, quickly identify faults in the electrical transmission and distribution system, lay the communications ground work for a smart grid, offer quick access to consumption data, decrease operational costs, provide for more accurate billing, and reduce turnaround time for customers who are relocating, according to W.A.P.A. The system will also allow customers to better manage their consumption methods and costs by monitoring energy usage in their homes and businesses in real time through a web portal that will come on line in the months ahead.

In order to take full advantage of the many initiatives that come with AMI as build-out continues, customers are encouraged to ensure their information is updated in the Authority's system by calling or visiting the Customer Service Office.