

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Says His Goal Of 90 Percent Power Restoration By Christmas Was Achieved

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Governor Kenneth Mapp announced today that his administration achieved its goal to restore 90 percent of power to the U.S. Virgin Islands by Christmas, after two Category 5 hurricanes nearly wiped out the territory's entire electrical grid.

"We set Christmas Day as our target and the linemen and many others worked hard to make this happen," Mr. Mapp said in a release issued by Government House. "My team was in daily, and often hourly, contact with those working on the power restoration effort and we held regular meetings detailing energization efforts neighborhood by neighborhood, road by road."

According to the release, by December 25, after the heroic efforts of more than 1,000 linemen and support personnel from the territory and the mainland, an average of 90 percent of power to eligible customers had been restored.

“We reached this milestone thanks to the assistance of linemen from the Water and Power Authority (WAPA) and around the country, who even now continue to work around the clock every day, including on weekends and under hazardous conditions, to restore our electrical grid,” said the governor.

“This is a near miracle and on behalf of the people of the Virgin Islands, I give each and every one of them my deepest gratitude,” he added.

As of Friday, January 5, power had been restored to 92 percent of eligible customers across the territory.

In the wake of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority set out to restore power to the territory as quickly and efficiently as possible, receiving directives from the governor himself.

It was nearly an insurmountable task, Government House said. After the two superstorms, almost all of the territory’s wooden electric poles lay broken like matchsticks and were strewn on the ground and blocked roads along with tons of other hurricane debris. Almost 90 percent of the territory was in the dark for weeks. Only a few power distribution sections were buried underground to service critical infrastructure such as hospitals, airports and business districts in the event of a major disaster.

Mr. Mapp, however, who has experienced three previous major hurricanes, was determined that residents have some semblance of normalcy by Christmas and this meant having electricity to light and cool homes, and to power refrigerators, washing machines, cell phones, computers and televisions, Government House said.

Mobilizing sufficient personnel, heavy equipment and materials from the mainland to restore power to four isolated islands took a herculean effort, including the transportation of people and supplies by land and sea, and housing and feeding an influx of hundreds of linemen to augment WAPA’s staff of 45 regular crew of linemen and supervisors.

To date, 8,851 poles; 5,142 transformers; and 5.6 million feet of wire were replaced, according to Government House. More than 600 bucket, utility and trailer trucks and digger derricks from all over the country were shipped on barges for at least 1,000 miles by sea to the Territory to support the effort.

Mr. Mapp thanked the Trump administration and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for providing funding and support during this crisis and the Virgin Islands Department of Public Works along with the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the National Guard, who worked to clear the roadways and right-of-ways so infrastructure repairs, such as restoring the power grid, could continue each day. He also thanked Bloomberg Philanthropies for their support, including advising on strategies for power restoration.

WAPA reports that electricity to some residents’ homes may not have yet been restored because of severe structural damage or because a licensed electrician has not been able

to certify that re-connection is safe.

Acting Executive Director and CEO of WAPA Clinton Hedrington, Jr., said, “In its more than 50-year history, the Authority has never seen the magnitude of decimation of its systems as we witnessed in September. We had to overcome major logistical challenges when transporting shipments of materials complicated by the multiple recovery efforts across the U.S. and the Caribbean. The restoration effort was augmented by the constant guidance from our governing board, the support of the Mapp-Potter Administration and the commitment and dedication of the WAPA family. We are grateful for those who have assisted in our recovery, and we wish to reassure our community that the restoration effort will continue until all customers who can be reconnected to the electric grid are restored.”

Mr. Mapp has repeatedly stated that his ultimate goal is to build more resiliency into the system by burying lines and utilizing more fiberglass composite poles, which are designed to withstand 200-mile-per-hour winds. In his testimony before the U.S. Congress in November, the governor said that it would be much more cost effective in the long term to bury lines. Government House says the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has agreed to Mr. Mapp’s request that the agency conduct a complete analysis on the cost and feasibility of burying the territory’s major power lines.