

The Virgin Islands Consortium

99.7 Percent Of Power Restored To WAPA Customers As Of Last Week, FEMA Says

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The U.S. Virgin Islands, after being pummeled by Hurricanes Irma and Maria in September -- sending all four islands into darkness for months -- is all but fully restored, with only .3 percent of customers without power as of Wednesday last week.

That's according to FEMA Federal Coordinating Officer William Vogel, speaking during a press conference held at Government House on Wednesday. Mr. Vogel said 99.7 percent of WAPA customers territory-wide had been restored, and he went on to praise the efforts of WAPA as well as the off-island linemen for their work. "What a great job that's been from all the linemen and from all of the people who've contributed to that," Mr. Vogel said.

At the same press event, Governor Kenneth Mapp said a little over 8,000 streetlights had been energized, with installations continuing across the territory.

In another sign of the progress in power restoration, Mr. Vogel said the Army Corps of Engineers has uninstalled more than 160 generators which were initially installed for emergency power. "[It] is a great sign that WAPA has done a terrific job," he said.

With nearly all customers restored, WAPA has moved to another phase of its own recovery, and has started the campaign of reminding residents of electric bills owed.

The utility recently said it acknowledged the difficulties being experienced by its business and residential customers in the aftermath of the two hurricanes. However, it added, after several months of delay, it resumed billing in mid-December for the services rendered up to September 5.

Late fees associated with these bills are being waived. Customers are encouraged to make payments via any of the payment options available: online at www.viwapa.vi, at the self-service payment kiosks at Petrus Plaza and Port of Sale Mall on St. Thomas and at Sunny Isle on St. Croix, as well as at local banks and customer service offices in Port of Sale Mall, St. Thomas, The Marketplace on St. John, and Sunny Isle on St. Croix. Checks, cash and credit cards are acceptable forms of payment at all locations.

The utility has also resumed billing customers for electrical service provided after the hurricane restoration began. Some customers were fortunate to have their service restored within a week of the hurricanes and have not been billed for that service to date. WAPA will be announcing how the bills will be issued for the period beginning from the customer's date of restoration through the end of December 2017. There will be options available for payment plans and consideration will be given, to the greatest extent possible, on a case-by-case basis.

In the meantime, WAPA is encouraging customers to make partial or estimated payments based on their past average bills using the many payment options available, except that such payments cannot be made to the local banks. By taking this proactive approach, a customer can avoid receiving a large bill covering the period from the date of restoration to the end of last year.