

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Cost To Harden Power Infrastructure Estimated To Be \$572 Million; WAPA Gets Overview Of Projects

VIC News / **Published On April 20, 2018 10:19 AM /**

Staff **April 20, 2018**



ST. THOMAS -- Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority Executive Director Lawrence J. Kupfer on Thursday laid out a slate of projects that have been approved under FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, WAPA has announced.

The hazard mitigation projects include the installation of more durable composite poles, a general hardening of the electric grid, the undergrounding of distribution feeders in critical locations territory-wide, and development of a micro-grid for St. John. Once all projects are completed, coupled with other mitigation projects completed in the aftermath of prior year storms, more than 50 percent of WAPA's customers will receive electrical service through underground facilities.

Mr. Kupfer spoke at the monthly meeting of WAPA's governing board on St. Croix explaining that the projects are designed to not only harden the electrical systems in the territory, but build more resiliency allowing the Authority to quickly recover after a natural disaster.

"We have experienced the devastating effects of hurricanes and windstorms, primarily on our transmission and distribution systems. Our goal is to capitalize on the federal funding available to build a stronger system and implement measures to reduce both our response and recovery," he said. The total cost of all hazard mitigation projects is estimated at \$572 million.

"On each island, a number of composite poles will be installed along the path of critical transmission cables; large banks of pole-mounted transformers will be replaced with ground-level pad mount transformers; and portions of critical feeder areas will be undergrounded. These projects build on previous mitigation work done in the aftermath of Hurricanes Hugo and Marilyn," Mr. Kupfer added.

Mr. Kupfer also updated board members on WAPA's efforts to prepare for the 2018 Atlantic Hurricane Season, which opens in six weeks. "We are working with the project team of Witt O'Brien's to take lessons learned and plan accordingly as we approach the start of the season," he said.

Additionally, Mr. Kupfer addressed the ongoing issue of extended billing periods facing the utility's customers. "We have added resources including temporary staff to manually read all meters. Due to the vast damage by the hurricanes, to the automated metering systems, all meters are being read manually. WAPA technical staff is deploying a temporary solution to facilitate the resumption of automated meter readings," he said. "We are now reading about 56% of all meters electronically. That number is growing as more and more of the system is rebuilt. A fair estimate is that by the end of May, we will resume a normal 30-day billing period."

By way of an update on streetlights, Mr. Kupfer said by the end of June all areas that were illuminated by streetlights prior to the hurricanes will be restored, and by year's end all street light fixtures will have been replaced. "

The contractor will be installing all new lights at locations across the territory. When we get to the end of this year, all older-styled lights and all of the LED's that were installed before the hurricanes will have been replaced," he said.

At the meeting, the governing board approved several hurricane restoration-related items:

- A time extension on a contract with Sulzer Turbo Services, the Texas-based company performing maintenance overhaul work on St. Thomas Unit 23. Maintenance has been completed and the unit is now being reassembled. Completion of work has been delayed by hurricane-related damage to some of the unit's components. The additional work required a time extension on the contract. The unit's overhaul contract totals \$4.5 million.
- A time extension on a contract with Haugland Energy for hurricane-related debris removal and final disposal.

- An increase in Haugland Energy's contract to provide debris shipping and designated staging area operations necessary to remove electrical system debris off island. The approval extends the contract by 46 days at an additional cost of \$3.5 million.
- Purchase of Polecrete stabilizer kits for both districts each at a cost of \$322,480. The kits will be used in the installation of composite poles across the territory and in solidifying installation and repairs of wooden poles.
- Change orders to existing contracts with BBC Electric Services and Haugland Energy for composite pole installation and permanent work on all islands. The approved changes increase the original Haugland Energy contract by \$4 million and the BBC Electric Service contract by \$1.4 million.

All hurricane-related repair work is reimbursable by FEMA as part of the overall restoration.

In other action, the governing board approved repairs to several water tanks for the potable water system in St. Thomas & St. John, amended the scope of work for the installation of water booster stations on St. Croix, and ratified a change order to an existing contract for a water project in Orange Grove, St. Croix. Additional funding was required to satisfy conditions of a road excavation permit as it pertains to resurfacing the roadway once work is completed. Some of the water projects are funded through a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Other items approved included a cost increase and time extension on a contract with Evertech Group, LLC, the company which provides billing and mailing services for WAPA and procurement of rate consultant services to assist with the 2018 Electric System Rate Petition. WAPA intends to hire PRMG to assist with the rate case at a cost not to exceed \$215,000. The board also granted approval for the utility to enter into a three-year lease agreement with Four Winds Plaza Corporation. WAPA intends to reestablish its St. Thomas customer service office at Four Winds Plaza once roof and other structural repairs are completed by the building's owner.

Board members present included Chairwoman Elizabeth Armstrong, Vice Chairman Noel Loftus, Secretary Juanita Young, Commissioners Devin Carrington and Nelson Petty, Director Marvin Pickering, Gerald T. Groner, Esq., Cheryl Boynes Jackson, and Hubert Turnbull.