

The Virgin Islands Consortium

WAPA Reports Steady Progress With Installation Of Resilient Composite Poles

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The Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority is continuing its effort to create a more resilient and reliable electric grid in both districts—electrical systems that can better withstand the effects of windstorms and hurricanes. The work will continue through the hurricane season, WAPA said in a release Tuesday.

More than 7,060 composite poles, capable of enduring wind speeds to 200 miles per hour, are slated for installation across the territory, WAPA said. The composite poles are one facet of the work WAPA and its contractor crews are performing to ensure that the electric grids can be more easily recovered, and electrical service restored should a weather event befallen the Virgin Islands.

“The installation of composite poles on all islands is slated to continue through October 2020. To date, we have installed a total of 1,297 composite poles -- 236 on St. Croix, 742 on St. John, 187 on St. Thomas, and 132 on Water Island. This represents about 18% of the overall project,” said WAPA Executive Director Lawrence J. Kupfer. He added that as composite poles are installed, crews are transferring service lines from existing wooden poles.

The newer type poles, warrantied for 40 years, are being installed in tandem with plans by the Authority to underground electrical feeders over the next three to five years.

“In essence, the composite poles are being installed in locations where the undergrounding of electrical service will not be provided. While the overall goal is to have underground service to 50 percent of our customer’s meter bases, there are areas on all islands where the underground will not be conducive, those are the areas we have targeted for composite pole installations,” Mr. Kupfer said.

While the composite pole installation will not be completed for this hurricane season, WAPA is taking steps to replace compromised wooden poles. “This use of wooden poles is sort of a stop-gap measure to allow us to strengthen the electrical system until those wooden poles are replaced with composites or with undergrounding of electrical feeders,” he added.

The undergrounding of feeders, installation of composite and replacement wooden poles are part of hazard mitigation projects that have been approved and funded by FEMA under a cost share formula with WAPA, the authority said.