

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Island-Wide Power Outage Blacks Out St. Croix As WAPA Attempts To Explain Why It Needs Base Rate Increase

WAPA / **Published On July 29, 2019 11:24 AM /**

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WAPA issued an alert at 10:56 Sunday night stating that a major electrical service interruption affected customers on St. Croix. WAPA said the island-wide interruption was a result of the loss of generation capacity at the Estate Richmond Power Plant. It further stated that plant personnel were working to rebuild generation capacity ahead of restoring service to the affected customers.

Power returned to some areas at about 11:40 p.m. In other areas, electricity did not return until the wee hours of Monday morning.

Today at 4:54 a.m., WAPA issued another alert of power interruption in St. Thomas. The authority said approximately 9,600 customers on St. Thomas were experiencing an electrical service interruption. Affected electrical feeders include 6A, 7A, and 7C. WAPA said power plant personnel were working to rebuild adequate levels of electrical generation capacity in order to restore service to the affected customers.

Before last night's and this morning's outages, [a district-wide outage](#) in the St. Thomas-St. John District left residents in darkness at about 1:20 a.m. Saturday.

Separately, in a release issued Sunday, WAPA attempted to explain why it is seeking yet another base rate increase on electrical bills.

"In an effort to build a stronger relationship with you, our customers, the authority wishes to share the reasons and rationale for its requested base rate increase which was recently filed with the Public Services Commission," WAPA began.

The authority will face the P.S.C. on Wednesday, and residents in St. Thomas plan to protest the proposed increase.

The latest increase, which WAPA said is 3 cents, is needed to allow the authority to do the following:

- Close the budget gap due to the impact of the 2017 hurricanes which has reduced sales. (WAPA said electrical usage has dropped by 16 percent resulting in a projected operating deficit of between 30-35 million dollars for fiscal year 2020.
- The increase will also help WAPA cover all operational expenses, including equipment maintenance, health insurance for employees, retirement contributions, salaries, which WAPA said accounts for 35 percent of operations expenses, and day-to-day operations.

WAPA said as it seeks an increase in the base rate, it is also asking the P.S.C. to grant a decrease in the fuel surcharge (LEAC) by approximately 3 cents. "This decrease will offset the base rate increase and hold steady rates at the current 43 cents per kilowatt hour for residential customers through the end of this year," WAPA said.

WAPA did not say what would happen to customers' bills come next year, and the authority wasn't clear as to why it singled out residential units as customers whose bills would hold at 43 cents per kilowatt hour until at least the end of the year, and not businesses as well.

And at 43 cents per kilowatt hour, U.S. Virgin Islands WAPA customers pay the most for electricity in all of the United States, with the lowest being 9.79 cents per kilowatt hour in Washington, and the highest 32.76 cents per kilowatt hour in Hawaii, according to [Electric Choice](#), which helps home owners/renters, small businesses, and large commercial customers find the right electricity rate, plan, and provider for them through its electricity marketplace in the U.S.