

The Virgin Islands Consortium

WAPA Plans To Use Spare Parts From Storm-Damaged Generator On St. Thomas To Bandage Failing Generator On St. Croix. Cost To Ratepayers? \$1 Million.

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The Water and Power Authority is paying an engineering firm nearly \$1 million to take used parts from a storm-damaged generator at the St. Thomas power plant and install the equipment on a failing generator unit on St. Croix.

WAPA's governing board signed-off unanimously Thursday on a no-bid contract with RG Engineering of Puerto Rico to cannibalize the Unit 18 gas-turbine generator sitting idle at the Randolph Harley Power Plant for spare parts.

The spare parts will be shipped to St. Croix to be used for repairs to the Richmond Power Plant's Unit 17, a "twin" generator that is crucial to keeping St. Croix's lights on.

"RG Engineering will be under contract to remove the parts from Unit 18 on St. Thomas, have them transported to St. Croix, installed on Unit 17, and test the functionality of the unit once installation work is complete," said power authority spokesman Jean P. Greaux Jr.

The WAPA board voted 7-0 at Thursday's emergency meeting to hire RG Engineering at a contract cost of \$836,319. An additional \$200,000 "contingency" was set-aside for cost overruns. The contract with RG Engineering was fast-tracked as a no-bid contract because of WAPA's ongoing power generation problems throughout the territory.

When WAPA is performing well, the Estate Richmond Power Plant generates 60 megawatts of electrical power with the capacity to go to 80 megawatts – more than enough to energize all of St. Croix at peak energy usage.

But the Richmond Plant's workhorse, the 20 megawatt Unit 17, has been inoperable since August 30th, when the propane-fueled generator abruptly crashed. "In the process of troubleshooting the cause of the shutdown, it was discovered that there was damage in the gas turbine compressor," according to the staff presentation to the WAPA board.

The root cause of the compressor failure is unclear, WAPA said. Nonetheless, when Unit 17 is down, the possibility of wide-spread power outages on St. Croix increases. Significantly.

"With the limited availability of generating units on St. Croix, it was recommended that we fast track the repair of Unit 17 by taking the parts needed from Unit 18 on St. Thomas," WAPA staff wrote.

Across the water, at the Randolph Harley Plant on St. Thomas, Unit 18 has sat idle for two years. It was heavily damaged in Hurricane Irma in 2017, and has since been "decommissioned," officials said.

Unit 17 and Unit 18 are identical pieces of equipment, making the exchange of parts a logical step in fixing the problems on St. Croix, said Damian Marius, maintenance manager at the Estate Richmond plant. "The generators are twins," Marius said.

When Unit 17 is back online, the Estate Richmond plant will be 100 percent powered by propane gas, said Mr. Greaux.

"The Richmond Power Plant has been 100 percent powered by LPG for some time. In fact, it can now be at 100 percent propane without U17. However, should a unit trip, there is no backup capacity -- we would essentially be running all generation at full tilt," he said.

"(Unit 17) being available provides the option of the plant being 100 percent propane fueled," Mr Greaux said.

RG Engineering has been a long-time contractor to WAPA, said Mr. Greaux. The Puerto Rico-based company specializes in electrical power generation, transmission and distribution. It started in the early 1980s distributing spare parts for gas and steam

turbines in the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, according to the company website.

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