

In Move to Further Encourage Virgin Islanders to be Energy Independent, V.I. Energy Office Announces Removal of Grid Access Charge

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The V.I. Energy Office this week announced that it was deferring a grid access charge (GAC) from its Net Energy Billing Program, a move that could serve as an additional incentive for Virgin Islanders to take advantage of the program.

In 2019, the Bryan administration announced a successor to the previous net metering program that would allow residents to offset their electricity costs by selling power back onto the V.I. Water and Power Authority grid. The program is for residents utilizing alternative sources of energy.

Called the Net Energy Billing program, or NEB, the effort aims to foster the deployment of distributed generation of renewable energy throughout the territory along with greater energy independence for property owners, the administration [said at the time](#).

This week, the Energy Office took another step to make the program even more attractive by deferring the grid access charge. It said that initial inclusion of the GAC "served to ensure that individual clients that invest in distributed generation continue to contribute to the utility's fixed infrastructure costs regardless of net excess monthly generation. The GAC was originally based on the installed system's nameplate size. This value was deemed fair and reasonable by all program development stakeholders to include the Public Services Commission. However, V.I. WAPA is currently undertaking a comprehensive cost of service study and avoided cost study. As a result, the decision has been made to defer assessing the GAC to distributed energy customers. The other aspects of the rate structure will remain the same to include the excess generation credit and non-monthly accrual of excess generation credits."

Energy Office Director Kyle Fleming brought further clarity to the deferral. "Initially we had included a fixed minimum fee for all new solar systems to account for fixed infrastructure costs that the excess solar production may offset," he told the Consortium Tuesday. "This was developed to offset the challenges experienced in the original Net Meter Program, where people over sized solar systems and often times ended up with negative bills despite being connected and still relying on the grid. After further review, we decided to remove that fixed fee until a comprehensive cost of service study could be conducted for the utility as a whole."

The Energy Office has been working to encourage energy independence, and during the summertime of this year announced the use of electrician certification permitting to fast-track the permit process for new and existing installations. "The VIEO would like to announce that the amnesty period relative to the electrician certification permit process concludes on February 1st 2022. To take advantage of the expedited permitting process, please submit applications using the VIEO's online permitting portal on energy.vi.gov."

Elsewhere, the Energy Office advised unregistered distributed energy stakeholders that the Net Energy Billing program is not voluntary. "We expect all currently installed, non-Net Meter, and future grid-connected distributed energy installations to be registered within the program," said the Energy Office. "The VIEO is available to schedule in office walk-throughs of the online permitting portal, and we invite installers, electricians, and property owners to call 340-713-8436 to schedule an appointment on St. Croix and St. Thomas."