

logo not found or type unknown

WAPA's Meter-Reading System Not Communicating With Over 12,000 Customer Meters, Leading to High Level of Estimated Billing

WAPA / **Published On November 14, 2021 05:02 AM /**

Linda Straker **November 14, 2021**

Image not found or type unknown



Despite being in operation since 2015, thousands of meters continue to not communicate with the V.I. Water and Power Authority's AMI system, or Advance Metering Infrastructure. This is resulting in estimated bills being sent to customers much to the annoyance of the Public Services Commission.

When the commission met at a regular meeting on Friday, Julius Aubain, WAPA's chief information officer and head of information technology, said that as of November 9, a little more than 12,000 meters were officially not communicating with the AMI.

The AMI is an automated system where the meters connect with multiple collectors around the islands and those collectors relay data to collection centers placed throughout the territory. The data is then transferred to WAPA's network and harvested for billing and monitoring purposes.

"We have been seeing some device failures on the communications side... Most are not communicating to the system," Mr. Aubain told the commissioners who had requested an update on the number of meters that are not functioning in the system and the reason for not having a fully functioning system.

"Most of the meters are working but are not tracked in the system. In theory, we can read them manually and get the data into the system and then uploaded," stated Mr. Aubain. However, he explained when this is done the system automatically rejects the numbers because it's not in sync with the existing history of the customers.

"This is what causes these customers affected to continue receiving the estimated bills," he said.

For the last billing cycle, 6 percent of customers received an estimated bill and out of that number, 2.6 percent were for locations where WAPA staff had trouble accessing. "This is because of dogs and locked gates and stuff like that," Mr. Aubain explained to the commissioners. He also disclosed that these customers will soon receive official communication explaining the reason behind their estimated bill.

"We are getting ready to send letters to those customers who have what we call 'can't get in,'" he informed the commissioners who expressed their displeasure with the continuous estimated billing structure.

"We need to get to a place where we no longer have continued estimation by bringing the meters where you can access them," said Commissioner Raymond Williams, who describe the challenge as a vexing issue for not just customers but for the PSC commissioners.