New Generators Projected to Lower Energy Costs Arrive in USVI, WAPA Says They Won't Be Ready for Use Until 2023

Top Stories / **Published On November 15, 2021 06:15 AM /**

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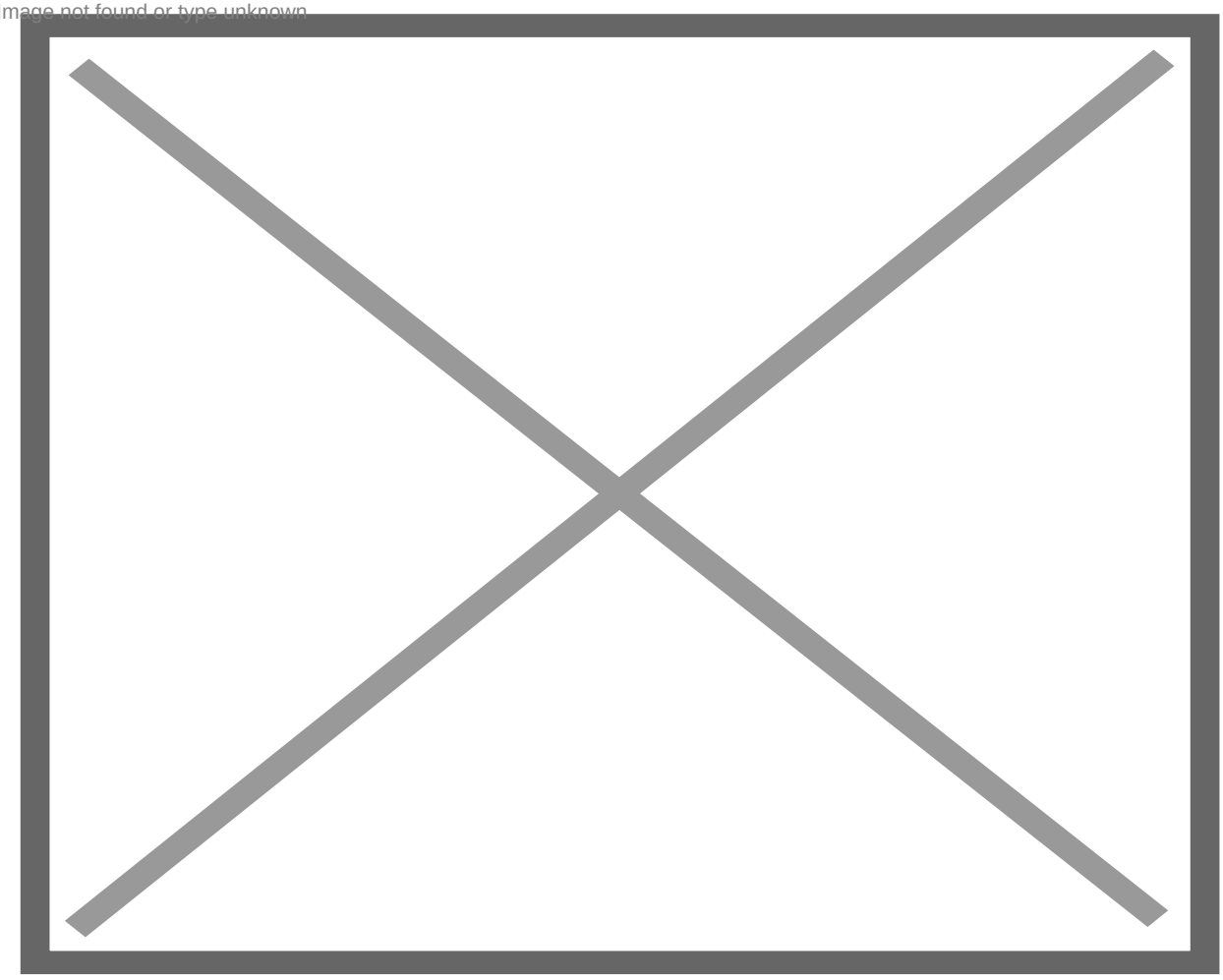

Wartsila Generator **By. WÄRTSILÄ**

Vernon Alexander, director of project management at the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority has told the Public Services Commission that the four Wartsila units or generators which arrived in the Virgin Islands last week will not be operational until February 2023.

“We will be able to achieve substantial installation, substantial completion by December of 2022, and commercial operation by February 2023,” Mr. Alexander told PSC commissioners during the commission's regular meeting Friday.

Noel Hodge, acting chief executive officer of WAPA had earlier informed the commission that the new Wartsila units had arrived in the territory. “They arrived in St. Thomas, those are four, 9 milliwatts Wartsila units which are being funded through a [U.S. Dept. of] Housing and Urban Development grant,” he said.

“Those are highly efficient units that will burn LPG and diesel and the heat rate is below 10,000 power transfer units (PTU) per megawatt hour. Those will have a great impact once prices are stabilized,” Mr. Hodge informed the commission.

Acknowledging the new units will provide better and more reliable power, PSC Commissioner Raymond Williams inquired about the timeline for installation, and it was at that moment the PSC learned that it will be 15 months after its arrival.

Mr. Hodge said the plan is to commission all of the generators at the same time and among the delaying reasons is a battery storage component that is involved in this project.

Explaining the 15-month period that will cover from installation to commissioning, Mr. Alexander said, “We have to install several auxiliaries, not just the units being onsite but there are several other auxiliaries we have to do and then to do other work which include the building of tanks, storage tanks for fuel in case we have any disruptions,” he told the PSC commissioner who felt that 15 months was a long time.

“We need to do the demolishing, we need to do the construction and make other changes…The first one took 18 months, this one will take 15 months. Some preliminary electrical work has been done but all of the electrical work has not been completed. The civil work has to be done and other mechanical installations have to be done as well, so some of the work is complete but the majority are left to be done,” said Mr. Alexander, who averaged that no more than 20 percent of the preparatory work for the generators was completed.

“In terms of percentage its about 15% to 20% of the preparatory works that were done, the foundation and electrical work, but then we have to do new piling for the areas where the cooling fans are going to go. We have to erect the stacks, we have to build the scrubbers, we have to install the oxidizers — there is still a lot of work to be done,” he said while outlining some of the work that is required.

Expressing his concern about work done before the arrival of the generators, Mr. Williams said, “Discounting the federal issues, I believe all these preparatory work should have been in place. I am really confused, I cannot wrap my head around it. We keep hearing about this and that and the other, I cannot blame you individually but at the end of the day, I am really at a loss,” he said.

“We have to make sure that this product remains reliable but at the end of the day, the consumer is getting beaten to death. We got to drill down on what we are doing here, we have to put more serious emphasis on what we doing. I don’t know how or what, but we have to do that,” he said as he pleaded to the management of WAPA for the generators to become operational before 2023.

Mr. Alexander had sought to provide some clarity to the commissioners. “Given the ease of installation for the batteries, the batteries will come before the generators, they will be completed before the generators, so we will be able to get benefits from the batteries before,” he said.

“However, for the generators as they are installed and completed and go through the processes, they will be tested in sequences one at a time,” he said while reminding the commission that the previous three units were commissioned after complete installation.

“It is possible if one unit is complete and we have completed all the other ancillary or auxiliary equipment…then we will be ready to commission and put the units online as well,” he said, pointing out that the schedule is subject to change once the project faces a disruption. “If we don’t have any interruption, if everything goes well, then the possibility exists that we can get them installed and online sooner than in a sequential manner."