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Failure of Air Conditioning System Causes Shutdown of Power Generation Unit in STT-STJ, Leading to Rotating Power Outages

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The Randolph Harley Power Plant in St. Thomas, USVI. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM

Residents in the St. Thomas-St. John District on Friday were subjected to rotating power outages following a major failure at the Randolph Harley Power Plant.

According to the V.I. Water and Power Authority, the air conditioning system that cooled power generating unit 23 failed, which then caused the control systems of the unit to overheat and subsequently shut down as part of a safety mechanism.

"The control equipment cooled down last night after the Authority mobilized large cooling fans as well as replacement air conditioning," WAPA said. However, when WAPA attempted to restart the unit, a valve that supplies the hydraulic pressure to the starting system failed, an occurrence that extended the outage further.

"Unit 23 is currently responsible for providing a significant percentage of generation capacity to the St. Thomas/St. John District, and with it offline, service was dramatically impacted and resulted in the power rotations." the authority said. "The power rotations, also known as load shedding, are necessary because without Unit 23, there is not enough generation capacity being supplied by RHPP and Unit 15, which is primarily operated on LPG fuel, to power the District."

WAPA added, "Our preferred operating configuration is to have the Wartsila generators operating along with Unit 27, which is our next most efficient unit. Unit 23 is an available standby unit. If Unit 27 were in operation, rotating outages would not be necessary. However, we have been in negotiations with GE to purchase Unit 27 for several months, and an agreement was reached late last week, with the transaction expected to be completed later this week. In the interim, Unit 27 has been unavailable to us since Thursday, June 23 pending the close of the purchase. With Unit 23 now down, an agreement was reached with GE to return Unit 27 to service immediately, and Unit 27 returned to service earlier today," WAPA said Saturday.

The authority has called an emergency board meeting to be held Sunday to request approval to purchase Unit 27.