

The Virgin Islands Consortium

WAPA Outage Leads to 24-Minute Late-Night Blackout at JFL Following Failure of Two Generators

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The Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

Senators on the Committee on Finance demanded to know the cause of a double generator failure that triggered a blackout at the Juan F. Luis Hospital and Medical Center on July, 7.

When senators met on Tuesday, the hospital's executives were asked to explain why the facility remained without electricity for approximately 24 minutes.

Douglas Koch, chief executive officer at JFL, described the outage as an “unfortunate set of events.” In explaining what occurred, he said the first generator worked for about five minutes during the island-wide outage but the fuel pump later malfunctioned and was not allowing fuel to get to the generator which in turn caused it to shut down.

The shutdown then triggered the second generator but according to Mr. Koch, “when the second generator came online, there was a failure of the solenoid on the electrical side of the generator.”

At approximately 11:03 p.m. July 7, he reported that both generators were operational again and have been monitored closely since then.

JFL Chief Operating Officer Hazel Philbert said those repairs and maintenance are ongoing. “We’ve actually been doing a lot more generator tests than we need to in terms of what the code requires, so our facilities director has identified some additional replacement parts to put on to one of the generators,” she explained.

She shared that a meeting has been scheduled for next week so that “key stakeholders” could assess the existing generators and identify any additional resources that may be needed to prevent another failure.

Committee Chair, Senator Kurt Vialet said the hospital was fortunate not to have lost any patients during that time.

“I think the whole island was really counting the minutes because we were really scared as to whether or not we would lose any patients,” he said.

“We could have lost patients in those 20 minutes. That’s the craziest thing for your hospital to be without current for 20 minutes. We need to make sure it never happens again. So whatever needs to be done, it needs to be expedited,” Mr. Vialet said.

“This is to never ever happen again,” Senator Kenneth Gittens scolded, recalling the night that the hospital was plunged into darkness.

The hospital is currently waiting to complete a final assessment on the 1200 KW generators which should be capable of running the facility independently in case of a power outage.