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Power Grid Hardening Projects Continue Territory-Wide With Over \$720 Million in FEMA Support Provided Since Irma and Maria

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Workers compact the ground in February 2022 for the installation of an electrical transformer pad in Cruz Bay, St. John. WAPA plans to make St. John's power grid more resilient with the burying of electrical lines in Cruz Bay. **By. FEMA/ERIC ADAMS**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency said Wednesday that substantial progress has been made to create more resilient power grids throughout the U.S. Virgin Islands since hurricanes Irma and Maria left thousands of homes, businesses and critical facilities such as hospitals without power five years ago.

FEMA said its partnership with the V.I. Water and Power Authority over the past five years has played a significant role advancing the work needed to strengthen the power grids to better withstand future storms and to increase year-round reliability. There are several projects taking place throughout the territory to support the construction efforts, such as the repair of electrical substations, burying of electrical lines and installation of wind resistant composite power poles to replace older wooden ones.

Through FEMA's Public Assistance program, nearly \$721.7 million has been approved for permanent repairs to electrical distribution systems and substations on St. Thomas, St. John, St. Croix and Water Island, according to the agency. This funding includes \$506 million in hazard mitigation measures to strengthen both grids' resilience to end the cycle of disaster damage and reconstruction.

"Projects for wind farms and microgrids are in the planning stages and it's been shown that these systems deliver affordable, clean and efficient energy," said FEMA USVI Recovery Director Kristen Hodge. "Additionally, President Biden's commitment to climate resilience through federal funding represents an investment that will ensure communities are better prepared for disasters before they strike.

Microgrid projects align with FEMA's 2022-2026 Strategic Plan Goal 2: Lead Whole of Community in Climate Resilience. An innovative microgrid would maintain power generation by disconnecting from the traditional framework and operate on its own using local energy generation in case of an emergency or disaster.

WAPA also plans to install 8,584 composite poles across the territory that are made to better withstand hurricane-force winds; 6,310 poles have been erected to date and the project is 74 percent completed, FEMA said.

Burying of electrical lines from Cruz Bay to the Myrah Keating Smith Community Health Center on St. John has been completed. Four electrical underground projects for Golden Grove, Midland, the Wilfred "Bomba" Allick Port and Transshipment Center in Frederiksted are underway on St. Croix.

FEMA and the territory will continue to their partnership to energize a legacy for renewable energy sources. In the western area of St. Croix, engineering and design work on a microgrid project will begin as WAPA has received a grant of \$4.5 million through FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP). The estimated project cost is \$129.7 million.

WAPA was also the sub-recipient of \$4.3 million for engineering and design work on the Bovoni wind farm and microgrid project on St. Thomas. The estimated project cost is \$59.3 million.

"FEMA and the territory will continue to work together to strengthen the power grid, build back better to increase the resiliency of critical services and improve the quality of life for all Virgin Islanders," the federal agency said.