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# 'Please Stop,' Says WAPA Chief After Customers Tell Employees to 'Kill Themselves' Following Blackout on St. Thomas

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**The Randolph Harley Power Plant in St. Thomas, USVI. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM**

The level of animosity towards staff who work at the V.I. Water & Power Authority has reached an unacceptable peak, as outlined when the company's chief executive officer and executive director, Andrew Smith came before the Senate Committee on Government Operations and Consumer Protection on Wednesday afternoon.

He told lawmakers that customers were verbally attacking his employees through its online portal. "One repeated message is that we should go kill ourselves," Mr. Smith reported.

“Quite frankly the profanity and the insults, and the aggressive comments from our customers and community that came into that line, I will not repeat it here because you would be disgusted,” he said.

In November last year, the head of WAPA’s corporate communications department [reportedly committed suicide](#), an incident that Mr. Smith referenced while making his plea for customers to stop insulting his employees.

“Those messages go to our dispatchers; they don’t go to me. I get them second-hand because immediately they let me know that this is going on,” the chief executive said.

“So I would implore people to understand that we are working as hard as we can. Criticism me, I set the strategy, criticize the leadership but the men and women who are working 24-hours a day in the dispatch center, they don’t need to read that kind of stuff. So, just please stop,” he urged.

Mr. Smith made the plea while addressing a power outage incident which occurred in St Thomas on Tuesday. According to Mr. Smith, at around 9.30 p.m. the company lost “all generation” at the Randolph Harley Power Plant, causing a blackout on the island.

“We believe the source of that outage was due to Unit 15 but we’re still investigating that,” he explained. “We got Unit 27 & Unit 15, which are two generators on St. Thomas at the Randolph Harley Power Plant, back in service at around midnight last night and we started to restore the feeders that that generation could support.”

The CEO added, “We ultimately need four generators online to support the entire island so we were in rotational outages overnight,” he explained. To replace two generators, Mr. Smith said, would cost roughly \$35 million and would save WAPA “a couple million dollars a month”.

The chief executive said WAPA was able to restore its largest generator - Unit 23 - at 8:30 Wednesday morning along with its ward silos (WAPA’s most efficient generation on St Thomas), which had experienced “information technology” problems during the outage, effectively restoring electricity to the island.

However, shortly after the restoration, Mr. Smith said unit 23 experienced a leak in a fuel valve that caused other generators to also malfunction. In the interim, WAPA started up Unit 27 to begin to restore the feeders but then the Wartsila encountered another information technology problem and Unit 15 tripped twice before they could ultimately restore power once again.

“It’s not an island-wide outage, we lost some feeders,” he remarked, noting that power in some areas had been lost later that day as well.

Mr. Smith said until the authority figures out why Unit 15 continues to intermittently shut off, Unit 23 will remain on to power that section of the territory. But that replacement generator is going to cost the company \$101,000 a day in order to maintain power.

“Leaving Unit 23 on is more expensive than Unit 15. Unit 23 runs on diesel, Unit 15 runs on propane,” he noted.