



# THE VIRGIN ISLANDS WATER & POWER AUTHORITY CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS NEWS RELEASE

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## **WAPA and FEMA Drive Forward Progress on Key Infrastructure Initiatives Territory-wide**



*Image: Representatives from ODR, FEMA, and WAPA meet on St. Thomas to discuss upcoming and current projects in the Territory.*

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS - July 16, 2024 – The Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority (“WAPA” or the “Authority”) held a productive and forward-looking meeting yesterday with representatives from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (“FEMA”), and Office of Disaster Recovery (“ODR”), and Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (“VITEMA”) to discuss the progress and plans for ongoing and upcoming projects. This meeting was crucial in ensuring smooth coordination and timely approvals essential for the advancement of the electric and water projects, aiming to bring lasting improvements to our community.

We are pleased to report that WAPA’s electric projects are moving ahead swiftly, leading the way in progress. While efforts are being made to synchronize with the Virgin Islands Waste Management and WAPA’s water division, some delays are being addressed due to pending approvals.

FEMA representatives reaffirmed to WAPA its commitment to working collaboratively with WAPA to streamline the review process. Ashley Bryan, Interim CEO/Executive Director at WAPA, emphasized, “It’s crucial to note that WAPA is operating power and water systems that have been crippled by the storms of 2017 and while prioritizing keeping the existing systems functional, we are also prioritizing mitigation projects that will bring much needed stability to our systems. Our main focus is to expedite key projects for both water and electric that will repair or replace critical infrastructure ensuring continuity after storms and reliability of service to our customers.”

Financial challenges were also a significant topic of discussion. "WAPA's cash inflows are currently less than outflows, making the cost share particularly challenging," noted Lorraine Kelly, Interim Chief Financial Officer. "Efforts are underway to secure immediate crisis funding through grants, and we emphasize the pressing need for a dedicated grant writer and researcher." With support from the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority, WAPA has been receiving CDBG-DR funds for cost matches on FEMA projects, managed by VIHFA under Housing Urban Development ("HUD").

During the meeting on Monday, representatives from the Office of Disaster Recovery continued to commit prioritization of WAPA projects, emphasizing the need for timely administrative cost approvals. While FEMA committed to providing additional planning support, specifically for developing a contingency plan for the St. Thomas/St. John electric grid. The Department of Energy ("DOE") and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory ("NREL") have been instrumental in supporting our renewable and microgrid projects, and their continuous involvement has been crucial.

Later this week, FEMA is scheduled to tour the Richmond power plant on St. Croix to get a firsthand understanding of the facility's needs and challenges. This visit is an important step in enhancing efficiency and resilience with the recent approval of the prudent replacement plan for the entire plant. We are optimistic that this collaboration will lead to meaningful progress for our power infrastructure.

Together, we can achieve lasting change in collaboration with all partners and stakeholders. As community members, we strive to be proud of the services we provide to the people of the Virgin Islands.

*The Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority Communication's department is committed to reaching, informing, and connecting with the youngest members of the community to the eldest, through meaningful, transparent and effective communication.*

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**About WAPA:** The Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority is an autonomous agency of the Virgin Islands Government which produces and distributes electricity and drinking water to residential and commercial customers in the territory. WAPA was created by the Fifth Legislature of the Virgin Islands in 1964 through Act No. 1248. Today, WAPA generates electrical power at production plants on St. Thomas and St. Croix and distributes electrical service through smart grids to customers on St. Thomas, St. Croix, St. John, Hassel Island, and Water Island. Potable water is distributed to almost 13,000 customers through water lines and standpipes. WAPA also has the responsibility of installing and maintaining streetlights.

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