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RESIDENTS FILE CLASS ACTION LAWSUIT AGAINST WAPA, ALLEGE FRAUDULENT NET METERING FOR SOLAR CUSTOMERS

Between 30 and 40 St. John residents have joined the civil suit which alleges that WAPA fraudulently charged them for power they produced from their own solar panels

As V.I. Water and Power Authority electric rates have steadily increased, many residents on St. John have invested in photo voltaic systems as a way to offset costs while using the island's most abundant free energy source, the sun.

After investing anywhere from hundreds to thousands of dollars, however, many residents who were expecting to watch their WAPA bills drop, were stunned to realize they were in fact charged for the power they had produced.

The problem was so widespread on St. John, Island Green Building Association

What WAPA has failed to do, despite repeated requests from co-counsels Attorneys Clyde Murphree and Raf Muilenburg, is compensate those customers who were wrongfully charged by WAPA for the power they were putting back into the electric system from their solar panels.

"This issue received significant attention some months ago when WAPA officials met with some of the affected folks," said St. John Attorney Muilenburg. "But WAPA has done nothing since then to 'make them whole.' In fact, we have been asking WAPA for many months to compensate our clients and to identify and compensate those other customers whom WAPA cheated and financially injured, but WAPA has made no effort to avail itself of that opportunity."

While WAPA officials have admitted they made a mistake, customers who were wrongly charged were left with no other choice except to take legal action, Muilenburg explained.

"It is apparent that only a court order and civil judgment will motivate WAPA to right this wrong, and we expect to obtain both through this lawsuit," said the St. John attorney.

As the sole commercial electric provider in the territory, WAPA customers have the right to be treated fairly, explained St. Thomas Attorney Murphree.

"WAPA enjoys a monopoly for commercial electricity production in the USVI," said Murphree. "In exchange for this monopoly, electricity consumers are entitled to be treated fairly and expect that WAPA operate within the law."