

Only One Word For Power On Saipan: Dimmit

By Diane Maddex
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SAIPAN—Aug. 13, the first anniversary of the big Saipan power plant fire, passed by with hardly a shudder of remembrance from anyone here.

But now that a mini epidemic of unannounced and unexplained power outages has taken hold in recent weeks, people here are once again thinking about power.

"We don't like to be in this situation. It's unintentional," said Antonio C. Tenorio, Director of Public Works for the Marianas District, which includes Saipan.

The "situation" is basically two-fold.

The first is that a turbocharger in the new power plant has cracked and is being kept in operation only by experimental

patch-ups. According to Deputy Director David M. Atalig, this turbocharger is connected to one of the largest generators in the plant and when it is not working the generator must be shut down. When that happens power in certain areas is rationed.

Although Public Works and the manufacturer have not decided who is to blame for the crack—the factory or the long ship ride—the department has gone ahead and ordered a \$3,300 replacement turbocharger. This has wreaked havoc with its budget, said Tenorio.

The temporary patching seems to be working, he added, while admitting that the generator will have to be shut down for several days when the new equipment arrives.

The second reason why Saipan residents can occasionally expect to be left powerless is that work on dividing the island into three separate power areas is stalled for want of an auger machine. The machine is broken and awaiting repairs. It is needed to dig holes for poles carrying the separate feeder lines to the main power plant.

"This work should have been finished by now," said Tenorio. When it is, loss of power from a burned out lightning arrestor or auto accident will not spread to the other two areas. Within

a fourth feeder area will be created, said Tenorio.

Other worrisome problems are that a 1,500 kilowatt generator "has been just sitting beautifully in the new plant for several months," he said. Needed electrical parts to run it are only slowly filtering in.

Then, the Public Works people have their eye on a 2,600 kilowatt generator. They could save at least \$50,000 on the more than half a million-dollar price if they order by Oct. 1. The catch is that the TT's capital improvements budget for fiscal 1974 has just been scratched by the U.S. Congress, temporarily at least.

Right now Saipan's three power plants have an operating capacity of 7,800 kilowatts, said Tenorio. The island's peak power load requires 6,700 kilowatts. This seemingly comfortable margin is swiftly demolished in the face of what Tenorio explains as the realistic plant capacity (subtracting one generator that might be out of commission at any given time): 5000 kilowatts.

In case this is not enough of a headache, the Public Works Department is in the process of studying an increase in utility rates.

This story on power, Saipan-style, would not be complete without reporting that the power went off two sentences from the beginning.