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Coast Guard Admiral Meets with GPA/GWA In Ongoing Efforts To Fortify Utilities' Cybersecurity Systems

(Fadian, Guam) – Rear Admiral John "Jay" C. Vann, Commander of Coast Guard Cyber Command made a special visit to the Guam Power Authority (GPA) / Guam Waterworks Authority (GWA) headquarters in Fadian on January 22, 2024 to meet with John M. Benavente, P.E., GPA General Manager; Chris Budasi, GWA Assistant General Manager of Administration; Melvyn K. Kwek, GPA Chief Information Technology Officer; Manny Apuron, GWA Information Technology Manager; and the utilities' executive teams to strengthen collaborative efforts to guard the island's public utilities from potential cyberattacks.

"GPA and GWA provide essential services for the island of Guam. The United States Coast Guard (USCG) is committed to working with U.S. critical infrastructure partners like them to increase cyber resiliency and defend against malicious cyber actors," said Rear Admiral Vann.

As Commander of Coast Guard Cyber Command, Rear Admiral Vann is responsible for conducting full-spectrum cyberspace operations in support of Coast Guard, Department of Homeland Security, and Department of Defense (DOD) mission objectives as well as helping to strengthen cyber security efforts for all of Guam. During his visit to Fadian, the Admiral toured the operation and then visited the Mangilao Substation and Mangilao Solar Farm.

GPA General Manager, John M. Benavente, P.E. shared, "With Guam's strategic geographic position and role in national defense, we face many potential threats to our utilities' infrastructure.

The defense of Guam is critical for U.S. National Security and protecting our island's utilities is vital for our residents. We thank the DOD and the USCG for their partnership with the Government of Guam (GovGuam) to bolster our cybersecurity systems and keep our data safe."

"GPA has had a cybersecurity plan approved by the U.S. Department of Energy since 2013. Cybersecurity has been a key part of how GPA conducts business. We are very appreciative of the Coast Guard's assistance," said GPA Assistant General Manager of Engineering and Technical Services, John J. Cruz, Jr., P.E.

Cyber security has been a top priority for Guam's utilities for many years. Melvyn Kwek, Chief Information Technology Officer (CITO) noted that two of the greatest threats Guam faces are weather and cyber-attacks, and the island is most vulnerable when natural disasters strike.

"For the past two years, GPA has partnered with the USCG's Cyber Command and local and federal agencies to stay ahead of potential threats and vulnerabilities to our Information Technology (IT) and Operational Technology (OT) infrastructure," said GPA GM Benavente. "We value our relationship with the USCG and appreciate Rear Admiral Vann's time and commitment to keeping Guam safe."

The USCG is helping Guam's public utilities to become more resilient against potential attacks and has been assessing GPA and GWA's OT systems to keep the infrastructure systems safe.

GM Benavente noted that CCU commissioners and GPA continue to make cyber security and physical security of GPA's assets and infrastructure a priority in present and future plans and annual budgets. GPA and GWA have Cyber Security Policies in place that are updated regularly.

GPA establishes annual cyber conference to strengthen preparedness on Guam

As part of its ongoing commitment to safeguarding Guam, GPA hosted its first Cyber Conference in October 2023 to gather subject matter experts to educate and share the latest threats and developments to safeguard the island's cybersecurity systems. GPA partnered with the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Cybersecurity, Energy Security and Emergency Response and the Idaho National Laboratory. The event included presentations from the USCG, the Department of Energy, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), and Guam Homeland Security – Office of Civil Defense (GHS). The two-day interactive CyberStrike Training Program focused on IT and OT environments and the nation's critical infrastructure systems and brought together 50 participants from GovGuam and federal agencies; Naval Facilities Engineering System Command (NavFac); CNMI CUC Utilities; the Guam National Guard; and IT and OT professionals to explore the latest developments in the ever-evolving world of cybersecurity.

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Photo caption:

Rear Admiral John "Jay" C. Vann, Commander of Coast Guard Cyber Command, U.S. Coast Guard and his staff visit the Guam Power Authority / Guam Waterworks Authority headquarters in Fadian on January 22, 2024 in ingoing collaboration to bolster the utilities' cybersecurity infrastructure. Pictured front row from left are Chris Budasi, Assistant General Manager of Administration, Guam Waterworks Authority; Rear Admiral Vann; and John M. Benavente, P.E., General Manager, Guam Power Authority. Back row from left are Francisco C. Santos, Manager of Power Systems Control Center, Guam Power Authority; Manny Apuron, Information Technology Manager, Guam Waterworks Authority; Marianne Woloschuk, Legal Counsel, Guam Power Authority; Lieutenant Philip Benton, U.S. Coast Guard; Command Master Chief Petty Officer Michael Brewer, U.S. Coast Guard; Chief Cyber Mission Specialist Bryce Beuerlein, U.S. Coast Guard; Chief Warrant Officer Jeremy Boltersdorf, U.S. Coast Guard; Commander Grace Oh, U.S. Coast Guard; John J. Cruz Jr., P.E., Assistant General Manager of Engineering and Technical Services, Guam Power Authority; Jennifer G. Sablan, P.E., Assistant General Manager of Operations, Guam Power Authority; Melvyn K. Kwek, Chief Information Technology Officer, Guam Power Authority; Tricee P. Limtiaco, Assistant General Manager of Administration, Guam Power Authority; and Joyce N. Sayama, Communications Manager, Guam Power Authority.