



NORWEGIAN PETROLEUM DIRECTORATE

Participants in a voyage aboard the *Sabvabaa* hovercraft measure the thickness of the sea ice during a landmark journey from Svalbard to the North Pole in the spring of 2012. The craft has been used by researchers since 2008, but new restrictions will essentially ban it from the area.

## Grounded rules

*New year means new limits on hovercrafts, hunting and fishing*

By **MARK SABBATINI**  
Editor

Like most places, a new year means new rules in Svalbard for things like driving privileges, cleanliness standards and educational requirements. They just don't look like the typical laws taking effect in other areas.

Affecting a certain group of drivers, for example, is futuristic hovercraft vehicles are a thing of the past in many more areas as of Jan. 1. The amphibious vehicles were already banned on land, frozen rivers and ice-covered

seas, but the restriction will now extend to one nautical mile of open sea from shorelines.

"We have a goal of limiting motor traffic in Svalbard and this change will help to preserve the fragile environment on Svalbard," said Tine Sundtoft, Norway's climate and environmental minister, in a prepared statement.

While the ministry states "the extension of this prohibition is made primarily for wildlife" and a desire to prevent new types of motor traffic in Svalbard, exemptions will be

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## Crime stats a scam

*31 percent increase in 2013 an illusion of low numbers, but rise in unreported crimes a concern*

By **MARK SABBATINI**  
Editor

When a few extra bar fights results in a 31 percent increase in crime for the year, it's safe to say you're living somewhere... safe.

But perhaps not quite as safe as the raw numbers suggest, since they don't reveal what for some is an unsettling rise in illegal activities that aren't reported.

There were 72 reported crimes in 2013, compared to 55 in 2012, according to the Svalbard governor's office. While that means Svalbard continues a long tradition of having one of Norway's lowest crime rates, it also allows mischief for those wanting to use fuzzy math.

"We had an incident last year that led to three cases of violence out of a total of nine," said former Lt. Gov. Lars Erik Alfheim, who departed office as of Jan. 1, in an interview with *Svalbardposten*. "We only had one assault case

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## Methane probe detects no stink

*Gas flare-ups in Svalbard's waters due to natural process, not climate change, study finds*

By **MARK SABBATINI**  
Editor

OK, that's one less way climate change is destroying the planet. At least for now.

A mysterious series of methane gas flares released from Svalbard's seabeds appears to be from natural processes and not, as some scientists suspected, climate change, according to research published this month in the journal *Science*. The fragile, ice-like solid fuel substances known as methane hydrates are stable

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GEOMAR

Carbonate crusts are observed on a Svalbard seabed 385 meters beneath the ocean's surface as part of a study about why high levels of methane gas are being released. The white organisms to the right, about 15 cm long, typically take several hundred years to build up.

## Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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## Corrections policy

When we screw up you'll know about it – on the front page. One of the big complaints about newspapers is they tend to bury corrections and clarifications deep inside where few people who read the original article see them. If we need to fix something, an alert box on the front page will state what story is in error and where the full correction is printed.

## Submitting material

Letters, columns, photos and other material are welcome, but we can't offer pay for published items since nobody here is getting paid at the moment. Submissions in electronic form (text, Word documents, JPEGs, etc.) are highly preferred, although typing and/or scanning of items will be considered on a per-case basis. We reserve the right to edit submissions for length, clarity, accuracy, libel and other reasons, but we will also make every reasonable effort to contact the author about any changes prior to publication.

## Grasping hat straws



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

New Year's revelers share an embrace at the Skjæringa memorial while watching fireworks over Longyearbyen shortly after midnight Jan. 1. The city received light snow on New Year's Eve, but skies were clear and temperatures only moderately cold as the New Year rang in.

## Icesheet

### Random bits of the week's weirdness:

We admitted we're hacks when it comes to picking Svalbard's biggest stories in 2013, but we spewed out a top-10 list last week anyhow since it's a traditionally lazy way for journalists to fill space while slacking off during the holidays. **Well some of the experts have weighed in on the most important happenings of 2013 and, shockingly, their picks differ considerably than our SWAGs.** Longyearbyen Mayor Christin Kristoffersen, for example, wrote an overview in the "Words From the North" blog mentioning, in order, Store Norske opening Lunckefjell (sidenote on our list), the city getting money for environmental upgrades to the utility plants (OK, we sorta had this second as well) and starting the first strategic analysis of industry potential for north since 1989 (huh?). As for the total restructuring of



LONGYEARBYEN LOKALSTYRE

**Big news if you're a bureaucrat:** Because long meetings are a lot more fun than getting shackled with a huge ankle monitor.



NORWEGIAN POLAR INSTITUTE

**Big news if you're a biologist:** Because spending months watching a blip move slowly on a screen is more fun than sitting in meetings.

local government, that was second-to-last on her long list, right before mentioning we're finally getting a veterinarian. Perspective matters, of course, so for the science news site Forskning.no it was all about the "Animals' Exciting World in 2013." Among the biggies was tagging some of Svalbard's birds with high-tech GPS trackers that revealed specific winter migration destinations for the first time (not even on our radar, so to speak). Then there's the "UNIS year 2013 in review" pictorial where the top item is a "selfie of the year" by two students in front of a glacier. Among the other items are "AG-342/842 students inspecting something and "how "those glaciologists sure can jump."

## So this is rather pathetic, but...

Our rogue editor could use a job so he doesn't have to take out a mortgage in order to keep giving this fishwrapper away for free. He's done and seen a lot, and is happy doing pretty much anything he doesn't have to write about (washing dishes, stocking shelves, etc.). Yes, he has nice references and all that from people who may or may not have received substantial bribes.



ESPEN STOKKE / SYSSELMANNEN

A fox trap is placed near Svea by an inspector with the Svalbard governor's office during an outbreak of rabies in the area in 2011. As of Jan. 1 the governor's office will begin enforcing new regulations requiring trappers to use devices that "shall function (with) such force that foxes are killed instantly."

## New laws affect hunters, fishers, trappers

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permitted for essential circumstances.

The new limit is a setback for researchers who have gained considerable attention for using the *Sabvabaa* hovercraft to conduct sea ice, earthquake, natural resource and other studies in Svalbard, including a first-ever trip to the North Pole in such a craft in 2012. Yngve Kristoffersen, a University of Bergen researcher, said the restriction isn't based on documented and verifiable facts.

"This lack of academic integrity in the management process is not a modern administrative one," he said in an interview with *Svalbardposten*.

The newspaper also noted the limit concerns Store Norske officials at Svea who will still be allowed to use a hovercraft for emergency rescues in wetlands inaccessible by boat or vehicle, but they are now banned from practicing those rescues.

Numerous other changes to the Svalbard Environmental Protection Act were enacted by Parliament after a lengthy process culminating in an extensive request for comments on the

amendments last spring. The statement by the Climate and Environmental Ministry notes "several of the approved changes are mainly modernization of existing regulations and partly regulations fixing current practices."

New rules affecting Svalbard's hunters, fishers and trappers are among those most prominently mentioned by the ministry.

Hunters, for example, will now need to pass an online exam as well as taking a required proficiency course. People failing the test can retake it once without paying an additional fee.

Trappers catching Arctic Foxes will now need to use devices that "shall function and have such force that foxes are killed instantly." Also, the Svalbard governor's office "may establish specific requirements for specification of traps and user skills."

For anglers, the most notable change is "fishing equipment and fishing gear used outside Svalbard must be disinfected before being used in Svalbard."

**There's more! Visit [www.icepeople.net](http://www.icepeople.net) for the complete story.**

## City makes big changes for '14, starting with bills

Longyearbyen has a completely restructured local government as of Jan. 1, but for the moment officials are mostly concerned about making sure locals know how to pay their bills.

The city has new bank account numbers

for most of its residential and commercial payments. A list of the accounts, translatable into English, is at <http://tinyurl.com/pbvojsa>.

**There's more! Visit [www.icepeople.net](http://www.icepeople.net) for the complete story.**

## HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

### Bjørnøya residents to star in 'Big Brother' style TV show

The nine residents at the Bjørnøya Meteorological Station are about to become TV celebrities in the vein of "Big Brother" as NRK plans to spend the next six months recording their daily activities. "There are none of us who have applied here to hide away," said Erik Sommerseth, the station's leader, noting those hired to work at the station this year were told about the show. "Most people look at Bjørnøya and the Arctic as an exciting experience, and then they go back to their active lives after it." Erling Bjørklund, an NRK cameraman who helped produce the 2004 documentary series "Life is Svalbard" in Longyearbyen, said he wanted to try a similar project in a different Svalbard environment. NRK will visit the station three or four times between now and June, spending a few weeks there each time. The program is not scheduled to air until this fall at the earliest.

### Eateries pass inspections, but most need to make fixes

Food establishments in Longyearbyen received generally good marks during inspections by the Norwegian Food Safety Authority last fall, but nearly all were found in violation of "internal control procedures" documenting their compliance. "It is, quite simply, a system that shows that companies are follow food laws," said Bjørn-Leif Paulsen, a senior inspector for the agency. The inspections were conducted because Norway's Food Act and associated regulations are likely to be made applicable to Svalbard in the near future, and officials want to note deficiencies and alert owners to the rules.

### New leader to preside over 16M in environmental grants

A new chairman will preside over the awarding of 16 million kroner in grants this year from the Svalbard Environmental Protection Fund. Morten Ruud, Svalbard's governor from 1998 to 2001 and currently a special advisor to the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, was appointed to succeed Ann Kristin Olsen during the board's meeting in December. The deadline for the first of two grant rounds is Feb. 1.

## Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Partly cloudy. SE winds to 25 km/h. High -15C (-21C wind chill), low -17C (-23C wind chill).	Cloudy. SE winds to 45 km/h. High -4C (-12C wind chill), low -16C (-22C wind chill).	Snow. SE winds to 45 km/h. High -4C (-11C wind chill), low -9C (-14C wind chill).	Cloudy. SE winds to 29 km/h. High -7C (-13C wind chill), low -10C (-15C wind chill).
24-hour darkness	24-hour darkness	24-hour darkness	24-hour darkness
<b>Extended forecast:</b> Sunday, cloudy, -5C (-10C), -7C (-13C), light 0:00h; Monday, p. cloudy, -2C (-7C), -5C (-11C), light 0:00h; Tuesday, cloudy, -3C (-8C), -5C (-10C), light 0:00h; Wednesday, p. cloudy, -3C (-8C), -7C (-12C), light 0:00h			
Data provided by storm.no			

## A cliff-hanger of a snowmobile crash



ARLID LYSSAND / SYSSELMANNEN

A snowmobile is partially submerged in snow in Adventdalen after its driver accidentally drove off a cliff during a snowstorm Dec. 24, falling at least ten meters and fracturing his neck. Tommy Sjøø Frantzen, a Longyearbyen resident with extensive snowmobiling experience, was driving with his wife to Vindodden when his GPS failed, according to *Svalbardposten*. When it resumed picking up signals he said it indicated he was to the left of the navigation track, so he made a turn right that sent the snowmobile over the cliff. Frantzen said he had a sore neck and back, but was able to get to his feet and turn on his headlamp, allowing his wife to find him and help him return to town. His head "suddenly felt very heavy" when they arrived and x-rays at Longyearbyen Hospital revealed fractures in his neck. He was transported to a hospital in Hammerfest, but "fortunately, the break very straightforward," he said. "I have to use a collar and have just been ordered to take it easy for a few weeks." He said he has already bought a new snowmobile and plans to go out again soon.

## Crime stats don't quite add up

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last year, so it goes without saying that there are extreme fluctuations in percentages."

Other increases included twelve environmental crimes in 2013 compared to seven the year before and three drug offenses compared to two. Categories with declines included traffic offenses with 13 in 2013 compared to 18 the previous year and environmental misdemeanors with 13 compared to 18.

Not captured in the numbers are some trends during the past year that are raising concerns. A significant increase in shoplifting at Svalbardbutikken, for example, resulted in the store installing security cameras and scanners in June.

Karin Mella, the store's manager, said the detectors have resulted in some thieves being caught, but there hasn't been a significant decrease in the overall problem.

"A little bit, but not enough," she said. "We're waiting for more (equipment)."

A survey published in March showed Longyearbyen youths are using alcohol and tobacco in much higher percentages than their peers on the mainland, and the problem appears to be growing. One-third of Longyearbyen's middle school students reported consuming alcohol to the point of intoxication, roughly double the mainland average and what one survey organizer called a record high. The survey also found 44 percent of Longyearbyen boys and 37 percent of girls at the middle and high school levels were intoxicated within the previous six months.

Longyearbyen Youth Council leaders also noted there is a rising number of youths having house parties where alcohol is available.

**There's more! Visit [www.icepeople.net](http://www.icepeople.net) for the complete story.**

## Warming not causing gas pains – yet

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only in high pressure and low temperature conditions.

"In 2008, when we observed the outgassing of methane for the first time, we were alarmed," said Christian Berndt, lead author of the study for the GEOMAR Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel, in a prepared statement. "The gas originates from depths where the hydrates should normally be stable. But we knew that a relatively small warming might

melt the hydrates."

Normal seasonal temperature variations over a long period of time – possibly thousands of years – appears to be the primary cause for the gas flares, the study's authors noted. But they also warned that climate change, while not an apparent factor now, may become one quickly since warmer temperatures will eventually affect deep-water areas.

**There's more! Visit [www.icepeople.net](http://www.icepeople.net) for the complete story.**

## What's up

### Jan. 8

6 p.m.: Movie: "Hundraåringen Som Klatret Ut Gjennom Vinduet og Forsvant," Swedish drama/comedy, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

### Jan. 12

5 p.m.: Movie: "Frost," U.S. animated family film dubbed in Norwegian, ages 7 and up. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Movie: "47 Ronin" (3D), U.S. action/drama, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

### Jan. 13

8 p.m.: Trivia quiz. Barentz Pub.

### Jan. 14

7 p.m.: Evening Mass and fireplace social. Svalbard Church.

### Jan. 15

5 p.m.: Movie: "Vi Er Best!" Swedish drama, all ages. Kulturhuset.

6 p.m.: Concert featuring Norwegian compositions by horn player Eirik Tonnem. Free. Svalbard Church.

7 p.m.: Movie: "The Book Thief," U.S./German drama/crime, ages 11 and up. Kulturhuset.

### Jan. 20

8 p.m.: Trivia quiz. Barentz Pub.

### Jan. 21

7 p.m.: Evening Mass and fireplace social. Svalbard Church.

8 p.m.: Svalbard Seminar. UNIS.

### Jan. 22

6 p.m.: Movie: "Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs 2" (3D), U.S. animated/family film dubbed in Norwegian, all ages. Kulturhuset.

### Jan. 23

8 p.m.: Svalbard Seminar. UNIS.

### Jan. 25

7 p.m.: Annual party for the Longyearbyen Hunting and Fishing Club. Old and new members welcome. UNIS.

### Jan. 26

11 a.m.: Mass. Svalbard Church.

## What's online

**Icepeople.net** provides daily updates of news about Svalbard and the world's polar regions, plus extras for articles from the print edition. Among the latest news:

- 75% of big carnivores facing extinction
- Greenland OKs drilling, despite impacts
- New beer in Iceland contains whale
- Polar bears in U.S. can't stand the cold