



Living under threat

Report: Svalbard ill-prepared for many large-scale emergencies such as accidents, epidemics

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

In the event of a large-scale emergency, odds are it'll be more difficult to cope with it in Svalbard than the rest of Norway.

That's the essence of a risk assessment by the Svalbard governor's office examining scenarios from flu epidemics to shipwrecks to nuclear incidents (accident or terrorist). The reasons are largely expected factors such as the archipelago's remote location, extreme elements and limited services in the 11 occupied settlements.

"The communities on inspection in the archipelago are scattered and there is no path between them," the report notes. "Emergency services and the majority of the infrastructure are in Longyearbyen."

One of the primary concerns is the limited health resources available if a major accident

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WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

What part of "northernmost" don't you understand? Officials in Hammerfest, left, at 70°39'N, and Honningsvåg, at 70°58'N, are continuing to argue which is the "world's northernmost city" despite rejections by Norway's Patent Office to the claim and Longyearbyen's actual superiority at 78°13'N.

Southern ignorance

Hammerfest and Honningsvåg continuing 'northernmost city' spat as Longyearbyen laughs

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

Diplomatically speaking, it's akin to two guys getting into a bar fight over a woman without noticing she left with her husband long ago.

A long-running feud between Hammerfest and Honningsvåg about which deserves bragging rights as the "world's northernmost city" is continuing despite Norway's Patent Office basically laughing off the matter – not to mention neither is actually in the top five geographically.

Longyearbyen, of course, has true claim to being the northernmost city and its leader isn't exactly fretting about what a couple of

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Bearly aware, not beware

Global hunt for polar bear guard attracts 300 applicants, but job goes to local who's been there

By MARK SABBATINI
Editor

After searching the globe for the most qualified person to fend off polar bears, the bosses decided the best person is a local who's not all that fascinated by the creatures.

Andreas Eriksson, 46, was chosen from about 300 people who applied to be a polar bear guard during a three-week historic site preservation project at Hornsund. He departed by boat Tuesday with members of the Svalbard

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PRIVATE

Andreas Eriksson, a Longyearbyen resident who worked as a polar bear guard in 2009, is getting another tour of duty this summer at Hornsund.

Who's to blame and how to express your wrath

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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.

Meet the world's most dangerous gangway



CHRIS WESTWOOD

A polar bear paws the hull of the cruise ship *Expedition* during a voyage in Svalbard in late June. Observers are offering various interpretations of the encounter (i.e. curiosity), but the most declarative appears to be a caption on Greenpeace's Facebook page gloating "check out this cheeky polar bear cub who pushed away a cruise ship when it came too close to his territory." The ship moved on shortly afterward without incident.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

We're guessing a few people are drinking a shot (or seven) of brandy from large paper cups this week after their near certainty of winning the annual "guess the melt date of the Operafjellet champagne glass" was smashed to pieces. Some locals apparently thought the stem of the giant snow glass had been severed Sunday, but "a narrow sliver of ice and snow still tied together the glass and the stem, which was difficult to see from the city," according to the "stem-commission" for the Local Paper of Rotgut, which sponsors the contest where two people win an engraved shot glass. The sliver was still there Monday and on Tuesday "the champagne glass was covered by low clouds and it was therefore not possible to refute or confirm the stem had gone." Those low clouds also left a dusting of snow, so the number of folks showing up to work with hangovers may be slightly higher than normal this week ... Maybe it's coincidence, but **last week's international conference to discuss issues related to our Doomsday Vault seems to have sprouted another round of articles about how it's "poisoning our planet."** We're not seeing any theories or conspiracies not espoused before (aside from a commenter named "Skepacabra" who declared "Doomsday Seed Bank" was the name of his band in college), but in the spirit of fairness we thought we'd give you the highlights of one especially noteworthy article in *Nation Of Change*. It begins with the usual ominous observation that Bill Gates is spending \$30 million for the vault "in a remote place called Svalbard, a barren rock



SVALBARDPOSTEN

An argument for the 570-megapixel camera: Magnify this photo enough and maaaybe you'd be able to argue the stem is broken. Then again, for the cost of the camera – used to capture starlight images from "countless distant galaxies" – you could just buy a lot of shot glasses.

near the Barents Sea" and that "the seed bank is almost ready to conduct 'business.'" OK, forget the objectivity thing since the vault actually celebrated its fifth anniversary in February and current houses more than 770,000 seed samples. But we'll let the author rant on a bit more, just for amusement: "If you think the recent scandals of the Wall Street Banks, Libel, and the Federal Reserve were outlandish, imagine global bio-warfare on the world population. That is what this is leading to. It will make the Russian bread lines flanked by the KGB of times past look like a play date." The recommendation? "Turn your lawn into a garden. Start your own aquaponics system" even though "city governments may try to fine you \$500 a day for planting your own food."

A royal deposit of rice



ADHINAND INDRAPIM / ROYAL THAI EMBASSY

Members of Thailand's Rice Department gather Thursday outside the Svalbard Global Seed Vault with 81 varieties of rice seed from the country that were deposited in the facility. The seeds, chosen to match Queen Sirikit's 81st birthday in August, add to an initial deposit of two species of Thai beans provided by Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn during her visit in March. Last week's visit by the delegation occurred during the annual meeting of the European Seed Certification Agencies Association, with representatives from 17 European countries and the European Commission participating. Among the issues discussed were difficulties establishing certification standards in future EU seed laws, setting guidelines for control pilot testing and field inspections of specific crops.

Governor: Even a small crisis can be big

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or pandemic outbreak occurs.

"For major accidents, we will quickly get into a situation where you need to use the resources to treat those patients most likely to survive, while the most damaged and sickest patients can only get basic help," the report states. "Several of these will die due to lack of resources."

Even a seemingly small-scale number of severely ill patients during a flu outbreak could become a crisis, for instance, since Longyearbyen Hospital only has capacity for five such patients if operating at maximum efficiency and "if a large number of people get sick, and especially if more medical workers get sick, it will not be possible to maintain daily operations."

Staffing levels at the hospital are the same as 1981 despite a significant population increase since then. Emergency medical transportation between Svalbard and the mainland also remains limited.

The governor's analysis covers 17 "danger zones" classified as either natural disasters, major accidents or "serious, intentional acts." It notes Longyearbyen's infrastructure is "basically sound," with ships at sea the most vulnerable to the Arctic extremes if a major incident occurs.

But aspects of the city's infrastructure remain a major – and sometimes increasing – concern. Among the evolving issues is fire, which is a bigger threat due to regulations in 2003 that halved the mandatory 16-meter distance between buildings.

"There are therefore a number of older buildings with lower fire safety standards in between newer buildings," the report notes. A proliferation of narrow roads also exists between them and many residents are storing vehicles, snowmobiles, gas cans and other hazardous items adjacent to buildings despite warnings from firefighters.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM SVALBARDPOSTEN

VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Hotel stays up 30 percent for first five months of 2013

Hotel and other lodging stays in Longyearbyen are up 30 percent for the first five months of 2013 compared to a year ago and the trend appears likely to continue, according to industry officials. Norwegian Airlines is receiving some of the credit for resuming flights to the city in March after a five-year absence, but officials also note hotel stays were up 20 percent in January. "Those who come here have also the desire to come to Svalbard," said Ronny Brunvoll, head of Svalbard Tourism. "It's not just about planes." He said repeat visitor numbers are also strong. Tourism companies are now working on a 500,000-kroner ad campaign for the typically slow fall months.

Adventdalen reindeer count reaches all-time high...

Adventdalen's highly variable reindeer population appears to be at a record high this year, according to researchers participating last week in an annual survey. The five-member team counted about 1,200 reindeer, including 300 calves, while traveling across the valley. "There have not been so many reindeer since records began in 1979," said Åshild Ønvik Pedersen, a Norwegian Polar Institute researcher who also participates in surveys of foxes and grouse. The reindeer count, about 250 higher than last year, apparently is due to warmer summers that allow for a longer fall grazing season, plus a cycle where a low count is followed by a high one as the population competes in a largely consistent food supply area.

...but polar bear sightings at alarming low in east Svalbard

An alarmingly low number of polar bears were spotted this spring in what's considered one of Svalbard's most important denning areas, according to Jon Aars, a Norwegian Polar Institute researcher. He said there are typically 30 to 80 dens in Kongs Karls Land, the easternmost part of the archipelago, but only two were spotted this year, with a loss of sea ice a likely factor. But he also cautioned the count is from a single flight and there are likely more – although it may be no more than "five or six."

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Occasional rain. NW winds to 35 km/h. High 7C (4C wind chill), low 4C (0C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. NW winds to 22 km/h. High 8C (6C wind chill), low 6C (4C wind chill).	Cloudy. Variable winds to 15 km/h. High 6C (3C wind chill), low 5C (2C wind chill).	Cloudy. SE winds to 15 km/h. High 6C (3C wind chill), low 5C (3C wind chill).
24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight
Extended forecast: Sunday, cloudy, 7C (4C), 5C (2C), light 24:00h; Monday, rain, 7C (3C), 5C (2C), light 24:00h; Tuesday, rain, 8C (5C), 6C (2C), light 24:00h; Wednesday, rain, 7C (1C), 5C (0C), light 24:00h			

Data provided by storm.no



STEIN TRONSTAD / NORWEGIAN POLAR INSTITUTE

An ancient hunting cabin at Adriabukta overlooks Hornsund, where workers with the Svalbard governor's office are spending three weeks documenting the structures for a preservation project.

Many apply, few qualify as guard

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governor's office who will document hunting cabins in the area, which became a whaling and sealing outpost among the British, Dutch and Danish beginning in the early 17th century.

"I just wrote that I was really interested in being outdoors," he said. "A lot of people if they come here they want to see polar bears. I'm just happy to be here. If I see a polar bear that's a bonus. I just try to do the job and see that the guys are safe."

Eriksson, who moved to Longyearbyen in 2006, spent three days working as a guard in northern Spitsbergen in 2009 and spotting five bears, "some of them really close – 20 or 30 meters away."

"Maybe they remembered I did a pretty good job," he said.

The familiarity will likely be an asset in Hornsund, where a polar bear was fatally shot this spring while trying to break into an occupied cabin during the Easter holiday.

"It's the same place so we will see lots of bears," Eriksson said. "Hopefully not too close."

The governor's office and other entities

'Northernmost' city? Not these two

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southerners have to say.

"It makes a great discussion, especially in northern Norway," said Christin Kristoffersen, head of Longyearbyen's municipal council. She said she's aware of it as "a classic dispute" that has "nothing to do with locality," but has no interest in making Longyearbyen part of the debate.

"This is just a mainland discussion," she said.

The feud focuses on numerous legalities and myths about what constitutes a proper "city," but the most recent development came after Hammerfest applied for a patent on the

typically recruit locals when seeking guards for everything from expeditions to marathons. But for reasons not completely explained, the governor decided to conduct a worldwide search this spring to fill its Hornsund vacancy.

The help wanted ad went viral, attracting the attention of hundreds of newspapers and major news sites, most pondering what type of person would be interested in a "stare death in the face" summer temp job.

"There was a huge influx of applicants, but many were quickly disqualified because they did not meet the qualifications we wanted," said Helge Solli, a senior cultural heritage advisor to the governor, in an interview with Swedish newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet*.

But while the governor's office chose to hire local, the newspaper and other publication still managed to play up the exotic international angle by noting Eriksson hails from Sweden.

"Swedes are popular employees in Norway with their service-minded and hard-working approach," *The Foreigner* noted in its coverage. "They have also saved the country's May 17 celebrations."

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

slogan "world's northernmost city," arguing it's been their trademark for 200 years. The patent office rejected the application this spring, stating the claim conveys no useful information to the public, according to *Finnmark Dagblad*.

Among the factual problems for Hammerfest is it's at 70°39'N, while Honningsvåg is at 70°58'N. But both are far to the south of Longyearbyen at 78°13'N.

Hammerfest and Honningsvåg are also southern compared to Barrow, Alaska, at 71°18'N, and three Russian towns with larger populations at 71°33'N and above.

There's more! Visit www.icepeople.net for the complete story.

What's up

July 9

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

July 11

7 p.m.: Art exhibit opening: "Svalbard Tur/Retur" by Hanne Borchgrevink, Tore Hansen, Inger Johanne Nygren and Terje Roalkvam. Galleri Svalbard.

July 14

11 a.m.: Mass. Svalbard Church.

8 p.m.: Movie: "The Internship," U.S. comedy, ages 7 and up. Kulturhuset.

July 16

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

July 21

11 a.m.: Mass. Svalbard Church.

8 p.m.: Movie: "World War Z," U.S. action/drama, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

July 23

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

July 28

6 p.m.: Evening Mass. Svalbard Church.

8 p.m.: Movie: "The Wolverine," U.S. action/sci-fi, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

July 30

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

Aug. 4

11 a.m.: Mass. Svalbard Church.

8 p.m.: Movie: "Pornopung," Norwegian drama/comedy, ages 15 and up. Kulturhuset.

Aug. 6

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

Aug. 11

11 a.m.: Mass. Svalbard Church.

8 p.m.: Movie: "R.I.P.D.," U.S. action/comedy, no age limit specified.

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:

- *NATO: No plans to up Arctic presence*
- *NASA polar rover aces Greenland test*
- *Finnmark debris may be Russian rocket*
- *Norway's shame: 'Gates of Hell' witches*