



A subtle terror alert

Extra security in Svalbard due to nationwide 'threat,' but officials say impact for most is minimal

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

While the threat is real, the chances of a terrorist attack actually occurring this week in Norway are considered low – and most certainly lower in Svalbard. But extra security measures are in effect locally, although officials said most people are unlikely to notice or be significantly affected by them.

"At the present time there is no reason to recommend people take special precautions," a statement issued Friday by the Svalbard governor's office notes. "Gov. Odd Olsen Ingerø stressed that the situation on Svalbard is almost normal."

Norwegian security officials announced July 24 there was a "credible threat" of a terrorist attack within days, likely by extremist Islamists with combat experience in Syria. The announcement came two days after the third anniversary of the attacks by Anders Behring Breivik that killed 77 people and a few days

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MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Passengers return to their cruise ship Tuesday at Longyearbyen Harbor, where extra security is in place due to a nationwide terrorism alert.



ARLID LYSSAND / SYSSSELMANNEN

Volunteers and members of the Svalbard governor's office load bags of trash collected from a beach on north Spitsbergen into boats for transport to the service vessel *Tyr* during the governor's 15th annual cleanup of northern coast. About 90 cubic meters of garbage was collected during the week-long effort.

Bear gains from net losses

Wildlife the true benefactors as 'trash lottery' winners collect tons in annual coastal cleanup

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

For winners of this year's lottery to be garbage collectors, the real prize might be the memories of seeing a true life-liberating benefactor of their labor.

A group of volunteers participating in the 15th-annual trash cleanup cruise along the northern coast of Spitsbergen spotted a polar

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Barentsburg mine still unsafe

Trust Arktikugol not adequately fixing 'safety culture' problems resulting in deaths, agency says

By **MARK SABBATINI**
Editor

The coal mine in Barentsburg is still plagued by a disregard for workers' safety despite repeated shutdowns and demands for improvements following a string of accidents that resulted in two deaths last year, according to the Norwegian Labor Inspection Authority.

Trust Arktikugol, the Russian-state owned

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TROND OLSEN / SYSSSELMANNEN

A Ukrainian man was killed by falling rocks last June at this location in Barentsburg's coal mine.

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.

'I was supposed to get rid of this snowmobile...'



WINJAR SCHANCKE

"...so why don't have a little fun with it first?" So explains Winjar Schancke who took his (modified) Polaris RMK 600 on a 16.1-kilometer joyride from Longyearbyen Harbor to about 300 meters from Grumat, where its newfound water-going capabilities foundered. A video of the 20-minute ride (at tinyurl.com/ka9nbq7) wasn't exactly a hit with locals questioning his "disposal" method, but it seems the snowmobile was retrieved and returned to Longyearbyen for a proper funeral.

Icesheet

Random bits of the week's weirdness:

As wonderful as Google Translate is for giving us a vague idea of what's being written about Svalbard in languages around the world, it tends to be about as accurate as an extremely drunk Babel Fish. The latest example comes from our **governor, who issued a press release suggesting speeding in Longyearbyen is punishable by death** if you rely on the computer translation (which we stopped doing after our first issue when we realized Google couldn't tell a snowmobile from a ship, or a polar bear from a teddy bear). The translation of the release notes a man in his 20s was stopped Saturday for driving at a high speed near Longyearbyen School and "the man was given a fine of 5,000 kroner as he passed away." A more accurate translation for that last bit is "as he accepted an immediate resolution," but we suppose that doesn't completely rule out the possibility of execution as part of the deal ... On the other hand, some folks actually facing a death penalty of sorts got off with just a warning as **four foreign tourists were brought from their campsite back to Longyearbyen after venturing out in a "rather bloated" rented zodiac without life jackets, survival suits or any type of polar bear protection**, according to The Local Paper of Rookies. They were spotted at Alkepynten at the mouth of Isfjorden by officials aboard the governor's service vessel *Tyr*, which was returning from its annual coastal cleanup cruise along northern Spitsbergen and "we opted for safety reasons to take them on board," said Lt. Thor-Arild Hansen ... And since this is turning into our first-ever police blotter (it'll be a sad day if/when it becomes a regular thing), **the first-ever Petty Schmuck Award goes to the culprit who prompted local resident Patricia Lie to post the following**



PHOTO BY ANDERS FRETHEIM

Paying \$180,000 to tour Svalbard like this? Yeah, we're pretty sure this is exactly what the one percenters who charter luxury yachts to "forge their own path" expect for their money.

on Longyearbyen's community Facebook page Tuesday night: "Who was the one who took 2 big boxes from outside my door in 232 35????? They were when i came back from work at 16:30 aproxi want then back immediately!!!!" We're guessing this is one theft that can't be blamed on the cruise ship passengers who've been getting very harsh treatment by us and other newspapers the past few weeks ... Finally, while not exactly theft, a feature in *The Australian Financial Review* titled "Sail away to the most isolated paradises on earth(sic)" feels like a con job, as their recommendation **"for the passenger who likes to forge their own path" is taking "one of the world's most luxurious ice-breaking super-yachts" through Svalbard** and/or other Arctic hotspots. The price to "follow the steps of early Arctic explorers" (who doubtless also had their own onboard Finnish sauna): a mere \$165,000 (low season) to \$180,000 (high season) for the privately-chartered yacht. Yes, there's room to invite a few friends, but still.



MARK SABBATINI / ICEPEOPLE

Svalbard police officers, right, prepare to enter a room in the marine laboratory at Ny-Ålesund as part of a training exercise in October of 2013 involving a man who has barricaded himself in the room with weapons. The drill was part of an increased nationwide effort to analyze and prepare for possible hostile incidents in the wake of the July 22, 2011, attacks by Anders Behring Breivik. An alert about a "credible" threat of a terrorist attack was issued last Thursday, resulting in a variety of heightened security measures, including closing some mainland airspace. But visible measures were minimal in Svalbard, with a man carrying a rifle, above, attracting no interest from authorities as he walks past the entrance to the airport.



JON STARHEIMSÆTER / SYSSELMANNEN

HEADLINES STOLEN FROM
SVALBARDPOSTEN
VERDENS NORDLIGSTE AVIS

Locals asking, getting high prices for eclipse rentals

A total solar eclipse next March 20 has Svalbard residents offering their homes and cabins for rent at insanely high prices, and there are plenty of desperate astronomy enthusiasts willing to pay. "A sea of requests" resulted in Eivind Trondsen renting his holiday home in Longyearbyen to six people for a week for 50,000 kroner. Other residents are seeking up to 100,000 kroner for short-term stays, although only people who own their homes are legally assured of being allowed to do so. Those renting residences "can accept private visitors, but there are different rules for conducting subleases," said Longyearbyen City Manager Lars Ole Saugnes. Hotels in Longyearbyen are sold out, although Basecamp Spitsbergen still has vacancies available at Isfjord Radio and on the *No-orderlicht* ship in Tempelfjorden. There are also a handful of spaces in package deals offered by travel agencies such as Travelquest Tours.

Gov.: Risk of terrorism low in Svalbard

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before Norway's hosting of a soccer tournament expected to draw 50,000 players and spectators daily.

Security measures adapted to local conditions in Svalbard remain in effect this week, "but the details of the measures we cannot comment," wrote Lt. Gov. Jens Olav Sæther in an e-mail interview.

Similarly, extra security measures are in effect at Svalbard Airport that are similar to those at other airports on the mainland, "but I can not tell you what they are all about," wrote Morten Ulsnes, the airport's manager, in an e-mail.

"These measures have had no impact on traffic flow in the form of delays or other," he wrote.

Longyearbyen Harbor is operating at a "level two" security stage for the first time since a new national rating system was enacted in 2004, said Rikhart Olsen Ingerø, the harbor's traffic and safety officer. The alert, in effect nationwide, means there are extra security officers on large cruise and cargo ships that have been in foreign ports, as well as at the security check gate at the harbor.

"This means that there's stricter identity control," he said. Among other things, it means "there's no visitors going onboard, only guests.

Also, the press, which sometimes goes inside to take pictures, that's all stopped."

Furthermore, no taxis are being allowed past the gate to pick up passengers in wheelchairs or with other disabilities. City officials are also conducting regular perimeter checks around ships using a service boat.

"All of the ships coming here were aware of the situation," the harbor official said. "Everything went well as far as I know."

Six ships that visited international ports have docked in Longyearbyen since the alert was announced, but the next is not scheduled until Aug. 8, he said.

Numerous national and international experts have stated Svalbard is a potentially attractive target for hostile activity by foreigners, although spying or computer hacker attacks are considered far more likely than terrorism.

A risk analysis released last July by the governor's office states "there is nothing to suggest anything other than that the terrorist threat on inspections Svalbard is low." But "if a terrorist attack occurs on Svalbard, there will be a need for rapid assistance from the police and other emergency response organizations from the mainland," and practice exercises of such deployments are worth considering.

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

Union demands Store Norske hire more experienced leaders

Local labor union officials are demanding Store Norske seek greater mining expertise – and political acumen – as it hires a new administrative and mining directors during the next several months. Arild Olsen, the union representative for Store Norske's employees, said such experience has been lacking at times, but it is vital during a transition in tough times.

Final attempt being made to find executed WWI miners

An attempt to find the graves of six Svalbard coal miners executed during World War II is getting a final 300,000-grant from the Norwegian government. The men were part of a 14-person group that hijacked an icebreaker in Isfjorden in 1941 and tried to sail westward towards an allied port, but were captured and executed at Hoåya in Oslofjorden. The discovery of a cartridge shell from that year at Nordbukta, plus testimony from the son of a man who saw a "darkened boat" and heard gunshots in the area at the time, prompted the request for extra funds from Helge G. Simonsen, who has led a search effort for the past seven years.

Weather forecast for Longyearbyen

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Partly cloudy. Variable winds to 22 km/h. High 8C (6C wind chill), low 5C (1C wind chill).	Cloudy. W winds to 42 km/h. High 5C (0C wind chill), low 3C (-3C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. N winds to 22 km/h. High 6C (2C wind chill), low 4C (1C wind chill).	Partly cloudy. W winds to 32 km/h. High 6C (3C wind chill), low 4C (1C wind chill).
24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight	24-hour daylight
Extended forecast: Sunday, p. cloudy, 8C (3C), 5C (2C), light 24:00h; Monday, cloudy, 6C (3C), 5C (1C), light 24:00h; Tuesday, p. cloudy, 7C (5C), 5C (1C), light 24:00h; Wednesday, p. cloudy, 10C (8C), 6C (4C), light 24:00h			

Data provided by storm.no



ARLID LYSSAND / SYSSELMANNEN

A helicopter, top, lowers a bundle of trash collected from the northern coast of Spitsbergen onto the *Tyr* for transport back to Longyearbyen during the 15th-annual cleanup cruise organized by the Svalbard governor's office. At bottom left, volunteers selected for the cruise in a lottery use logs to pry a fishnet loose on a beach. At bottom right, a video shot from a helicopter captures a polar bear's struggle to free itself from a fishnet on an ice floe. The animal broke free as the helicopter approached.

Annual cleanup falls short of record

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bear caught in a fishing net. But the bear was able to free itself from the 170-kilogram net as a helicopter from the Svalbard governor's office, which hosts the cruises, approached the animal to assess the situation (a video of the flight is available at tinyurl.com/ngy3uwty).

It was the second such sighting during the past month, as researchers from the Norwegian Polar Institute were sent to the north part of the island to sedate and remove a strand from a net that had formed a noose around the neck of another bear who eluded search efforts for weeks.

"It's a scary thought from an environmental perspective, and we have also seen cases where animals have been stuck in nets and ended up dying a painful death," said Thomas Aga Ulvestad, a police chief inspector for the

governor, in an interview with NRK.

About 90 cubic meters of trash were collected during the past week by two groups of 12 volunteers working three-day stints along the shores, according to a press release from the governor's office. The total fell short of the record 155 cubic meters collected last year and the 154 cubic meters bagged in 2012.

As usual, most of the waste was from vessels, including various plastic materials, as well as bottles, cans, shoes, lighters and other debris. While the cleanups have managed to reach much of the northern coastline, environmental officials estimate it takes about six years before a cleared beach needs to be cleaned again.

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

Russian 'mentality' disregards mine safety

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company that oversees operations in the settlement, promised to address numerous infrastructure and safety awareness problems as a condition of reopening the mine in January. But the labor agency, after visiting the mine in June, stated in a letter last month that while some improvements have been made, they are not adequate to address the overall concerns.

"Trust Artikugol has even admitted problems with a lack of safety culture," the letter states.

"It was explained that this is related to the differences between Russian and Norwegian mentalities. The company found that some employees violate safety rules to make the work easier for themselves. Often it may go well, but the company was aware that such actions in-

volve accidents and that it leads to an accident sooner or later."

Furthermore, the agency notes the disregard for safety is a problem that originates at the top levels of management, which was pointed out by inspectors after similar inspections in 2012 and 2013.

The agency is giving Trust Artikugol until Sept. 1 to submit a written plan with a schedule detailing how the deficiencies observed will be remedied.

The mine was most recently closed last September after a man lost his leg when it was trapped in machinery. It was the seventh accident since May of 2012 resulting in serious injury or death.

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

What's up

Aug. 3

11 a.m.: Mass. Svalbard Church.

Aug. 5

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

Aug. 9-10

Basic sea kayaking course. 9 a.m.-5 p.m. both days. Contact Svalbard Sailing Club at svalbardseil@gmail.com for details.

Aug. 10

11 a.m.: Mass. Svalbard Church.

7 p.m.: Movie: "Sex Tape," U.S. comedy, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

Aug. 12

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

Aug. 16-17

Basic sea kayaking course. 9 a.m.-5 p.m. both days. Contact Svalbard Sailing Club at svalbardseil@gmail.com for details.

Aug. 17

11 a.m.: Mass. Svalbard Church.

7 p.m.: Movie: "Guardians of the Galaxy" (3D), U.S. action/sci-fi, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

Aug. 19

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

Aug. 20

6 p.m.: Movie: "How to Train Your Dragon 2" (3D), U.S. animated family film, ages 7 and up. Kulturhuset.

Aug. 24

11 a.m.: Mass. Svalbard Church.

5 p.m.: Movie: "How to Train Your Dragon 2," U.S. animated family film, ages 7 and up. Kulturhuset.

7 p.m.: Movie: "Hercules" (3D), U.S. action/adventure, no age limit specified. Kulturhuset.

Aug. 26

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

- *Rising seas making floods more common*
- *Once-frozen Arctic sea has 16-ft. waves*
- *Man brings lead poisoning to Antarctica*
- *Inuvik Muslims get northernmost mosque*