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Nunavut

January 19, 2007

Resolute struggles with frozen pipes

"It's really fun working outside at -46 C with the wind chill when you're standing in a pool of water."

DAN BENOIT

Workers in the hamlet of Resolute Bay have been jumping from one work site to another in recent weeks trying to fix frozen water pipes.

Recent cold snaps have frozen Resolute's copper utilidor pipes. Laid in the 1970s, most of the pipes are now 30 years old.

Copper pipes, after freezing once or twice, become very susceptible to breaking, said Ralph Alexander, Resolute's assistant senior administrative officer. He knows the consequences.

"I had no water for three days."

Workers have been working steadily on the pipe problem, with little success.

"It's been like this for a month now," Alexander said.

Workers cleared out a line, which helped to increase the low water pressure, and then another line went down. This happened three or four different times in different places, he said.

"Nobody has figured out why yet," Alexander said. "It's just a little problem in the main line. It's nothing serious, just annoying."

Temperatures have hovered around -33 C in the hamlet, which he said was "basically normal for this time of year."

Repairing the pipes will be a costly proposition, he said.

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“Say 100 hours at 60 bucks an hour, that’s \$6,000. It adds up,” he said.

The engineering poses a problem right now too.

“It’s underground, it’s hard to visualize,” he said.

Add to that the physical discomfort workers have to endure to do the work and the problem gets bigger.

“It’s really fun working outside at -46 C with the wind chill when you’re standing in a pool of water,” he said.

Lindsey Pelky, maintenance foreman for the Resolute Bay Housing Association, said a few of the association’s tenants have had frozen water pipes in the past few weeks, but as the end of the business day neared on Tuesday, none of the association’s 33 units had any problems.

“We’re basically on top of the thing, it’s just an ongoing problem,” he said.

He says neither the hamlet nor the GN are doing much to fix the problem, nor is there much they can do.

“Mostly, they just do Band-Aid work. It’s a pretty outdated system,” Perky said.

He said the biggest problem with the sewer and water pipe system is it’s outdated, and he’d like to see a newer one installed.

“It would be nice to be on an upgraded system. There are a couple of areas that are massive problem areas.


“We don’t want to switch over to tanks,” he said.

“With all the infrastructure going into Nunavut right now, I don’t think the system will be able to keep up.”

Alexander said at this point, there’s little they can do until the weather gets warmer.

“Then it should resolve itself.”

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