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March 15, 2002

Cape Dorset's ailing water system finally cracks

New system just three weeks away when construction stopped last fall

PATRICIA D'SOUZA

The hamlet of Cape Dorset was three weeks away from the completion of a new pipeline when its 20-year-old system cracked in the cold this week.

The pipes burst in several places early Saturday morning when the unit that is supposed to keep them from freezing broke down.

"Something went terribly wrong with the heat tracer," said Art Stewart, the town's senior administrative officer. "What happened, I don't know."

The town faced an emergency situation with just a few days worth of water in its tanks. On Tuesday, Stewart spoke with representatives of the department of Community Government and Transportation in Iqaluit.

"We're looking at preparing a temporary pipeline from T Lake to the reservoir water point," he said. The temporary pipeline will follow the same route as the old line, but was expected to take a collaboration of efforts -- and at least a week -- to set up.

Stewart estimated the town would need half a mile of pipe, as well as various couplings and gaskets. Iqaluit's Emergency Measures Organization was taking care of the materials, he said.

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"I don't know what problems we'll run into."

In the meantime, hamlet crews were filling tanks with water from Q Lake. They had originally planned to use Dead Dog Lake, but, Stewart said, "the name scares people." The lake's water was sent for testing, and residents were instructed to boil it before drinking.

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Repairing the old pipeline is expected to take two weeks of work. "We have to dismantle the whole pipeline and thaw it out," he said. "That's not factoring in weird things happening."

Construction of the town's new pipeline is expected to resume when the weather improves in June. Though the town did ask the construction company to resume immediately when faced with the prospect of no water, the company said the cold made the materials too brittle to install.

In the meantime, Stewart said Cape Dorset residents have been working together to conserve water. "People seem to be doing well. They're anxious to help."

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