ARCTIC ATMOSPHERE

Kugaaruk, Nunavut December 4, 2011, Issue 18

The sun sinks toward the horizon around noon Saturday Nov. 19, dimly lighting the bay's surface marked by snow machine tracks.

Water Woes by Aine Misek

Some Kugaaruk residents received a surprise Tuesday when they took a gulp of the latest water delivery and swallowed a mouthful of saltwater.

A surge, caused by an extremely high tide, hit the hamlet at some point during the weekend or Monday and pushed saltwater so far up the river that it somehow breached the barrier separating the river from the freshwater lake located near the airport that serves as the hamlet's freshwater supply.

During a walk around 7 p.m. Monday night, John noticed standing water on top of the ice along the bay's edge, evidence of the surge in hindsight.

"That seemed strange," he said. "It's been -30°C for nearly a week and I've heard people say the ice is nearly two feet thick." No water was visible along the shore or elsewhere during a walk the Miseks took on the bay Nov. 19.

On Tuesday, unsuspecting water truck drivers continued their deliveries and filled a number of houses with saltwater before the problem was detected. Some of those residents have resorted to melting snow for drinking water. The Miseks' duplex didn't receive a water delivery for a couple of days; therefore, they had a half tank of freshwater left when they received the news.

The family's handy dandy, all-purpose Rubbermaid tub collection came to the rescue as John and Aine filled three tubs to the brim, along with other miscellaneous containers, to serve as a drinking water reservoir. All the water will be boiled before consumption, as per the normal routine they've followed since arriving in Kugaaruk.

The chain of water delivery is fairly long — the water is pumped from the lake into the tank trucks, run through numerous hoses, and delivered to all the individual storage tanks in town. After traveling such a circuitous route, boiled water seems to be the safest for drinking, though many hamlet residents just use Brita filter pitchers or drink the water straight from the tap.

The heavier saltwater has settled to the bottom of the lake, but no one is sure how long it might take to pump it out and restore the quality of the supply. Holes were drilled farther upstream from the lake to serve as a secondary water source, but there are concerns about the quality of that water, which is full of sediments stirred up by the surge. Samples have been sent out for testing.

The school continues to distribute bottled water and juice to students every two hours and encourages them to conserve washroom water. Kugaaruk residents were asked to restrict water usage to the bare minimum because the water trucks weren't delivering much for a couple of days as people evaluated the situation.

Folks are concerned water tank corrosion may occur if saltwater is used but a lack of other options is forcing the hamlet to deliver saltwater until freshwater is again available. People still have to flush toilets and do

The Miseks gather freshwater in the containers on hand. Hopefully the stash will last until the saltwater problem is resolved.

Ups & Downs Nov. 26 – Dec. 2, 2011

Maximum = -4.5˚C/23.9˚F **Minimum** = -32.0˚C/-25.6˚F

Source: Environment Canada, Station Kugaaruk A, Nunavut [Nov. 26,27,28,29,30,Dec.. 1]

Mostly cloudy, some high winds and snow flurries

Dec. 4 **Sunrise** = 10:25 a.m. **Sunset** = 11:14 a.m. MST

Cabin Fever Cure

Aine's Journal ~ Dec. 2, 2011, Friday ~

Going to a health appointment never felt like a social outing before.

After spending eight days in our duplex, the ninth day, Nov. 29, brought reprieve in the form of a 1 p.m. prenatal appointment at the health centre. It was getting quite dark as Mari and I ventured outdoors; it was pitch dark by the time we grocery shopped at the Co-op and struggled home at 2:30 p.m. through the blowing snow.

Unfortunately — or fortunately, depending on one's state of cabin feverishness — I had to head to the health centre again this afternoon. My cold of two weeks still lingers and I began to suspect strep throat today.

From appearances, that doesn't seem to be the case, the nurse said, but I'll have to wait for test results to know for sure.

At least I had another outing for the week, even if it was for a throat swab!

Hamlet Mourns Again

John received the phone call late Tuesday night. A 29-year-old mother, related to two of the school's staff members, committed suicide that day.

It was exactly what the community feared most after the suicide on Nov. 7, a possible chain reaction. Historically Kugaaruk's been spared such tragedy, but some Nunavut communities have suffered extremely high numbers of suicides in short periods of time.

The rate of suicide among Inuit males is generally much higher than that for women, but according to the territorial government report *Nunavut Suicide Prevention Strategy October 2010* frontline workers estimate Inuit women attempt suicide as frequently as men.

"Beyond actual deaths by suicide, rates of suicide attempts and suicidal ideation (thoughts of committing suicide) appear to be very high in Nunavut," according to the report. "In 2009 alone, the RCMP responded to 983 'occurrences where persons are reported to be threatening or attempting suicide.'"

According to data from Qikiqtani General Hospital in Iqaluit, Nunavut's capital located on Baffin Island, nearly half of the hospitalizations of people between the ages of 20 and 29 were the result of attempted suicide.

"Nunavummiut have been exposed so directly and repeatedly to suicide that they have come to accept the situation as normal," according to the report.

Nunavut Suicide Prevention Strategy October 2010 attributes Nunavut's high suicide rates to the rapid and radical societal changes that the Inuit have experienced in the past 60 years or so.

"This unresolved trauma compromised their ability to cope with stress in a healthy manner," according to the report. "Negative behaviour often followed in the form of alcohol abuse, sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, child neglect, and violent crime.

"In the absence of an adequate healing process, a continuous cycle of trauma has been created, which has been passed from generation to generation."

Continuous trauma was evidenced in this week's death — the woman's sister committed suicide in Kugaaruk in autumn 2010.

WATER WOES CON'T. — dishes.

If the water sample results turn out to be unfavourable, the plan — at this point — is for a CC-130 Hercules transport plane to deliver freshwater to Kugaaruk, alleviating the situation until the problem is remedied and to spare people from relying on melted snow for drinking water.

TOP: John and Mari follow a snowmobile track across the bay Nov. 19. The bay is smooth this winter because the sea ice that normally floats into it from the ocean, creating a rough terrain when the bay freezes over, failed to appear this year. **LEFT:** Aine and Mari trek past a bulbous formation produced by water seeping up and freezing around a rock in the bay. **RIGHT:** Some grass manages to stay upright despite the rough conditions along Kugaaruk's frozen shores.