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X53 Hultgren

Notice to residents about Avalanche danger detailed in the NVE report published December 2016 - informasjon til hjemmeside

To all households in Longyearbyen
Your reference: Our reference: 2016/1712-3-X53 Case manager: Kjersti Ingerø Olsen Date: 2017/1/10

Notice to residents about avalanche danger detailed in the NVE report published December 2016

Longyearbyen's municipal government (LL) wants to make residents aware of how the Longyearbyen Community Council is handling current issues and topics related to the monitoring of avalanche hazard mapping conducted by Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate (NVE), plus further work in relevant areas, in a complete and proper manner. Following the avalanche in December of 2015 an avalanche warning system was immediately established under the auspices of NVE. NVE has also conducted surveys of avalanches and landslides in Longyearbyen. The result of the investigations are stated in the report "*Avalanche risk mapping in selected areas in Svalbard*," hereafter referred to as the NVE report. The report was published Thursday, Dec. 15, 2016, and was reviewed at a public meeting at The University Centre in Svalbard the same evening. We explain in this letter the main points of the report and follow-up to it.

What authority and responsibility is given to Longyearbyen's municipal government

Existing emergency preparedness regulations took effect in Longyearbyen on Dec. 18, 2012. They gave the Longyearbyen Community Council a larger overall responsibility to protect citizens and visitors in an emergency. One emergency preparedness duty is to have an updated emergency plan. The purpose of having an overall contingency plan is that everyone knows who does what in an emergency. We are confident that all conceivable tasks are addressed and resolved in a satisfactory way so that residents and visitors feel well cared for. The Longyearbyen Community Council has established contingency plans with detailed actions linked to various events, including weather conditions where there may be a danger of avalanches. We have regular training exercises and we are prepared to deal with possible closing of areas or roads, as well as evacuation of residential areas.

Investigations carried out and the "NVE report"

The NVE report "*Avalanche risk mapping in selected areas in Svalbard*" contains detailed mapping of the avalanche danger in Longyearbyen's land-use planning areas. The maps of the report show that avalanches, slush avalanches, landslides and debris flows are the incident types that pose dangers for the settlement. There are a total of 154 residential units and two hostels located within 100-year risk zones, which means that the annual risk of an avalanche capable of reaching the buildings is 1/100. Nearly 180 units and several other types of buildings are located within a 1,000-year risk zones. Those zones are also being used further in connection with land-use planning and building regulations. The maps in the avalanche report cover the areas of Vestpynten-Bykaia, Longyearbyen, one area at the entrance to Todalen and three areas in Bolterdalen-Foxdalen. The basis for the hazard zone maps are studies of maps and aerial photographs, terrain model analysis, climate analysis, previous avalanches, field surveys and modeling of avalanche dynamics. The report, including the landslide maps, is available in its entirety at our website www.lokalstyre.no

What does the avalanche warning system involve?

In addition to regional avalanche warnings for Nordenskiöldland, there are continuing local avalanche warnings and slush avalanche warnings for Longyeardalen.

NVE's local avalanche warning system involves a monitoring of avalanche danger to buildings and is an important measure to ensure sufficient security of avalanche-prone structures. This type of mapping of avalanches in steep terrain is performed by NVE in the most vulnerable municipalities in the country. There are many who live in avalanche-prone areas in Norway, and NVE assists with both flood and avalanche prevention nationwide.

Avalanche warnings gives local governments a solid basis for making their decisions about what to do. We can never give guarantees about natural hazards, but we consider that solid knowledge of avalanche danger, avalanche warnings and emergency procedures provide good security for at-risk settlements.

In situations where the weather dictates there is a risk that avalanches may reach buildings, NVE will consult with The Governor of Svalbard and the local government in Longyearbyen. The governor and Longyearbyen Community Council will, on the basis of advice from NVE, consider further measures. There may be increased surveillance, closing of roads and/or evacuation of settlements. It is important to emphasize the Longyearbyen Community does not possess avalanche expertise and will therefore rely on assessments made by NVE or other avalanche-savvy experts.

Additional reports about future actions will be contracted by Longyearbyen's government to other entities. Those will include an assessment and design of avalanche safeguards. NVE will assess the relevant need for avalanche prevention measures in Longyearbyen compared with other avalanche-prone areas on the mainland and prioritize them accordingly.

What happens during an evacuation

If the governor decides settlements should be evacuated, residents affected can get all necessary information at Longyearbyen's local government website. A housing office with a waiting room will be established for evacuees. Most likely this will be the Rabalder cafe at Kulturhuset. If necessary, there will also be an evacuation and relatives center (EPS center). The establishment of a residential office and/or EPS center will depend on the buildings that are threatened and how many people have to move from the area. When the avalanche danger is over they will be able to move back.

The NVE report tells us nothing about the probability (frequency) of possible evacuations. Since LL has limited housing, LL asks residents in the avalanche-prone areas to make arrangements for accommodation with a colleague or friend who lives outside these areas. Without the help of citizens and – if the scale is of a certain size – the options for evacuation will, for example, be camp beds or similar arrangements in Svalbardhallen.

Safe to live

In Longyearbyen, there are certain areas which under certain conditions can involve a risk of avalanches. The state hazard mapping has revealed that more than 150,000 people in Norway live in areas prone to flooding or landslides (Parliament Message 15 (2011-2012)). With the establishment of the local avalanche warning in Longyearbyen the local council believes that it is safe to live within the avalanche-prone areas in Longyearbyen.

Contact and additional information

Longyearbyen's government has staff who can answer any questions you have. They can be reached by calling the information desk at 7902 2150. Staff will direct you to the right person based on what questions you may have. We are also working to put all available information at a separate avalanche tab on LL's website www.lokalstyre.no containing avalanche risk assessments, plus information about avalanche warnings, evacuations and emergency preparedness.

This notice is also being published in Norwegian and Thai.

