LAST DAYS AT PEA BEFORE DEPARTURE



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Switching to winter mode

This season’s last group of scientists from the PASPARTOUT, EXPOSOILS, NISAR and CRYOS projects left last Friday, February 14th to head back home, leaving only 12 station crew left behind for the final days of the season. Everyone was very happy with the research they were able to accomplish this season and were very happy with the logistical support they received.

Those left at the station have started putting the station into winter mode, which is a lot of work for the whole team.

Firstly, all scientific equipment that cannot be left outside during the harsh winter is either safely packed away at the station or prepared for being sent to the university or research institution that deployed it. Instruments are kept functioning for as long as possible before being packed away so they can continue collecting data. The launch of weather balloons every other day for the ACME project to get a radiosonde profile of the atmosphere will continue until two days before departure.

Now that supplies that arrived a few weeks ago on the cargo ship have been put away and added to current inventory, the team has been doing inventories of all the spare parts for vehicles and construction at the station and the food stocks to see if anything new needs to be ordered for next season.

Another important task to complete before departure is to raise the station's annexes, which sit on a moving glacier. While the main building of the station is firmly fixed to granite ridge, its annexes sit on a very slowly moving glacier, which can move 10-15 cm a year. Thankfully a new system the IPF team devised a few years ago makes this task a matter of adding some metal plates to pylons beneath each annex at the start and end of each season.

And of course the water treatment system must be shut down for the winter. One by one systems that use water are closed for use. About five days before departure, the toilets are shut down, which means only dry toilets can be used. The following day the showers and the laundry are shut down. Once everything has been shut down, plumbers Simeon Polet and Laurens Gonzalez then need to drain the tanks of the bioreactors and empty all pipes of any excess water that cannot freeze during the winter months.

A season to be proud of

The season passed by very quickly and the team at PEA worked together like a well-oiled machine to solve any problem scientists may face - which is inevitable in Antarctica - on the spot.

Scientists were very happy with their stay at PEA and they are pleased with the data they were able to collect. Overall, 17 scientific projects were supported by the International Polar Foundation staff during the course of this season. Three expeditions took place with heavy logistic at remote locations from PEA for several weeks at the time. Left alone, the scientists working remotely (with the help of the staff on site), PEA was able to welcome a total of 24 scientists this season. This is close to the number of staff members present to support them, which is an impressive ratio.

Bad weather has forced the staff to prepare the station and surroundings for overwintering a few days in advance, but according to forecasters, the weather will clear over the weekend and the remaining 12 members of the 2024-25 BELARE team will leave on Monday, February 24th, with the goal of reaching Cape Town the following day. It will be the end of a very successful season, full of great accomplishments and memories.

The Princess Elisabeth will be well prepared to survive the next eight months unoccupied - until the 2025-26 team starts her up again in November!