SWITCHING THE PRINCESS TO WINTER MODE



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Switching to winter mode involves checking that the electrical and communication systems are working properly, verifying that all scientific instruments are running autonomously so they can continue to collect data, raising the station's annexes to compensate for the movement of the glacier underneath it, covering the station's solar panels, shutting down the snow melter, and draining the water treatment system.

As it's one of the greatest comforts the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica offers, shutting down the snow melter and draining the water treatment system tend to be the last tasks the team does each season.

The shutdown is done in several phases. First the flush toilets are closed about a week before departure, as the bioreactors need time to treat the black wastewater. Then about five days out the washing machines and showers are shut down, and tap water is switched off. Grey water takes less time to treat.

Of course this means the last five days of the season the team has been living without certain comforts - sort of like camping at the station. But roughing it is part of the shared Antarctic experience, and the team is used to spending several days in the field without showers or toilets.

If time allows, a final task the team will try to accomplish once the water treatment system has been drained will be to install the metal i-beam underneath the water treatment system to reinforce it. Otherwise, this will be one of the first tasks for the BELARE 2026-27 team when they arrive in November.

While the team has enjoyed their time at the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica and has many accomplishments to be proud of this season, many are looking forward to heading back home to see their families.

If all goes according to plan, in a few days the team will be enjoying the austral summer weather in Cape Town before heading back home to Europe.