

Company sails through Northwest Passage

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NUNAVUT - The 2009 sealift was a year of firsts for Nunavut Eastern Arctic Shipping (NEAS).



David Ell, marketing director for Nunavut Eastern Arctic Shipping's Iqaluit office, said better marine infrastructure is needed in Nunavut communities serviced by the company. - NNSL file photo

To service the Kitikmeot communities of Kugluktuk, Cambridge Bay, Gjoa Haven and Taloyoak, the Montreal-based shipping company sailed through the Northwest Passage with an ice-breaking vessel.

"That was our first time. We never went (through) there before," said David Ell, marketing director for NEAS' Iqaluit office.

In addition, NEAS began offering what it's calling a "thru-rate" service from Winnipeg.

Under that system, clients in the Kivalliq communities of Rankin Inlet, Chesterfield Inlet, Arviat, Whale Cove, Coral Harbour and Baker Lake have their orders packaged by Winnipeg-based NEAS subcontractor transX Logistics, which sends the goods by rail to Valleyfield, Que.

"It's a cheap backhaul rate (for NEAS)," said Suzanna Paquin, president of NEAS.

The goods are then shipped by water, like normal, from Valleyfield to the various Northern communities.

"It's quicker and probably cheaper (for customers). More reliable," said Paquin. "What we've been hearing a lot is that, that rail service (from Winnipeg to Churchill, Man., from which packages destined for Nunavut proceed via barge) is not reliable.

"The Kivalliq sort of has this tendency to buy things in Winnipeg. But anybody can use the (thru-rate) service because we load in Valleyfield for every community."

NEAS' shipping season typically begins in June and ends in early

November.

During the 2009 shipping season, NEAS made a total of nine sailings to 46 communities in Nunavut and the Nunavik region in Northern Quebec.

Overall the year went smoothly, but as always, there were some hitches, said Ell.

"It went pretty well. We just had one (ship) that had a problem with its engine," he said.

The MV Avataq, a 113-metre cargo ship, broke down in the Hudson Strait near Salluit, Nunavik on Sept. 25. High winds of more than 75 km/h threatened to run the ship aground.

Later, it ran into engine trouble going to Hall Beach, said Ell.

"She had no problem going to Repulse Bay, (but) had a bit of a problem going to Hall Beach and Iglulik because of wind and ice, but she made it," he said.

The problems encountered raised the issue of the need for better marine infrastructure in Nunavut communities serviced by NEAS.

"We need better staging areas, safer anchorage for vessels at sea," said Ell.