

Ice floe floats Soviet station to U.S. shore



JUNEAU, Alaska (AP) — An ice floe carrying an abandoned Soviet research station, hundreds of drums of fuel and potentially hazardous chemicals has been found after missing for more than three weeks off northern Alaska.

The island of ice was breaking up and half the structures and all the barrels were missing, the Coast Guard said.

A flight crew who spotted the scientific station Sunda, about 180 miles west of Barrow, said no drums were sighted and there was no sheen on the water.

"Minimal environmental damage is expected to result to the U.S. continental shelf from the release of diesel oil, due to the distance from shore," the Coast Guard said in a statement.

The floe broke loose from the Soviet coast July 24, the Coast Guard said. On Sept. 2, it was reported drifting in the Arctic Ocean 55 miles northwest of Barrow, the state's northernmost city.

North Slope Borough and federal officials were concerned about pollution and the navigation hazard posed by the ice floe and any floating fuel drums, particularly with the start of the fall Eskimo whaling season.

The Coast Guard said it equipped one of its C-130 transports with a sensitive radar system to help find the drifting island, North Pole 31.

That came after a half-dozen attempts were made by the North Slope Borough Search and Rescue Division to relocate the ice floe.

North Slope and Coast Guard officials went to the station in July, when it first was reported to be breaking away and when the 23 people working there needed help getting off.

A Soviet cutter rescued the workers, and that was the last time the station's location was known until the Sept. 2 sighting by a walrus researcher.

The Soviets had left 500 drums of diesel fuel, 30 drums of aluminum powder, 10 drums of lubricating oil, four bags of caustic soda and 600 empty drums at the site, according to a memo to the Coast Guard from the Soviet Marine Pollution Control and Salvage Administration in St. Petersburg.

Satellites indicate that the ice floe is moving northwest, toward the Soviet Union, officials said.

The Soviets have accepted full responsibility for the station, and have said they will remove what structures and drums remained, the Coast Guard said.

Such stations usually are used for long-term study of ice, currents, weather and sea floor topography.

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