

Nunavik battling harmful mould in region's childcare centres ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

"When daycares close, we are paralysed"

The Kativik Regional Government said it's getting to the root of the mould problems plaguing the region's daycare centres.

Four childcare centres in Nunavik have been decontaminated in recent months after mould was found growing on the interior walls or under flooring in the centres.

Just this past January, an inspection discovered mould between the windows and walls at the childcare centre in Kangirsuk, closing the facility until a temporary one could be opened.

Now, the KRG is waiting on results of an assessment of Aupaluk's childcare centre, while three more centres will be assessed for mould this year.

And, if that's not enough to manage, three other childcare centres in Nunavik have been decontaminated from oil exposure, often caused by burst pipes.

Overall, 12 of the region's 19 publicly-funded childcare centres, known as Centres de la petite enfance or CPE in Quebec, have faced lengthy closures and multi-million dollar repairs.

"For sure, mould and oil contamination is serious, and we take it very seriously," said Margaret Gauvin, director of the KRG's department of sustainable employment, which oversees the region's childcare centres.

"We are taking care of it."

But it's not an easy process; once a centre has been found to be contaminated, it can take weeks - even months - to determine where the mould is located and how to properly decontaminate the building.

Often times, walls and floors have to be pulled up, Gauvin said.

The KRG must also contact public health, in case children are exposed to the mould.

"It's a problem and it goes way back," Gauvin told regional council meetings Feb. 24.

"In daycares, snow would get in, melt, freeze, then melt, freeze again, and it could take several years before the mould would form."

That's why we're visiting all the centres," she added. "Once we know how it gets it, we can adjust the construction to make sure it's not."

Renovating a childcare centre in the region can run the KRG about \$2 million a centre, she said, but it still makes more sense to repair existing facilities, rather than leave a mould building in a village.

The construction of Nunavik's childcare centres was staggered in the region's communities beginning in the late 1990s and through the mid-2000s.

Gauvin said that a lawsuit that the KRG filed against one of the centres' builders helped to pay for renovations in some of the affected centres, although more recent repairs are paid for entirely by the KRG.

In Kangirsuk, the community's childcare services are now operating temporarily out of a former sewing centre and a private home, until the original centre is decontaminated.

That's a relief to local parents who, since the beginning of the year, had to find alternate child care or take the children to work.

Amaartauvik, the only childcare centre in the community of 550, would normally care for up to 30 children.

Across Nunavik, just over 1,000 infants and children are enrolled in full-time childcare.

"When daycares close, we are paralysed, because all the workplaces are impacted," said Puvirnituk's regional councillor, Aisara Kenaujuak,

in KRG meetings last month.

"I think we really have to support our daycares and do all that we can, because when they close, we lose an arm and a leg."

Region: Quebec ^[3]

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