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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Rare Snowmelt Floods Power Station in Russian Far North

Warmer temperatures increasingly threaten Russia's energy infrastructure.

By Ben Aris for bne IntelliNews

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The Lovozero lake in Russia's Murmansk region melted, an event which occurs once every 1,000 years. **Bne Intellinews**

There were more melting permafrost problems for Russia's energy infrastructure after the TGK1 power station on the Far Northwest reported June 9 that two of its hydropower units were flooded with "abnormal water inflow" due to melting snow.

No serious damage was done, although the company's personnel have been put on high alert.

The water levels at TGK1's Tulomskiye and Serebryanskiye hydropower plants in the Murmansk region saw water levels rise rapidly to unseasonal highs after snow at the Lovozero lake melted — something which occurs once in 1,000 years, according to the company.

TGK1, which is majority owned by Gazprom, has already ordered personnel at the plant to work under an emergency mode. The emergency services have been notified of flooding and the potential threat to the plants' buildings — which operate in what is supposed to be an area of permafrost.

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There are no commercial or residential buildings in the region that could be affected, as the power plant was built in a remote area. The company has sent a division to monitor and control the situation.

At this stage, TGK1 does not anticipate any interruptions to electricity supply to consumers.

The flooding at TGK1 follows an oil spill in the mining town of Norilsk on Russia's Far North coast last week that was the worst in the country's history and has been declared a national emergency.

Norilsk is also in a permafrost region. A fuel pipeline broke and dumped millions of gallons of toxic fuel into the nearby river, causing massive environmental damage that will take decades to clean up. The reason for the accident is believed to be melting permafrost that caused the pipe to sink and fracture.

The whole of Eastern Europe has been subject to two very warm winters, which has caused a glut in the gas market. But now it seems that the warm weather is threatening to cause even more serious damage, and the melting permafrost could in theory threaten much of Russia's pipeline infrastructure.

"The warm winter and high water inflows led to elevated hydro generation in the first quarter, a trend which has continued into the second quarter, VTB Capital said in a note. "TGK1 reported 18.5% year-on-year growth of hydro generation in the first quarter. This latest news about the abnormal increase in water inflows yet again shows that melting permafrost continues to bring more technical issues in Russia."

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