

Three planes destroyed in fire

Aircraft providing food and mail to settlement communities destroyed

by Andrew Rankin
Northern News Services
Inuvik

Three planes that provide food and mail to communities in the Beaufort Delta was destroyed during when an Aklak Air hangar went up in flames in Inuvik on Friday.

Fire crews arrived at the airport not long after 12:10 a.m. when the front section of the building was on fire.

Crews used loaders to try to pry open the hangar's front doors to access the planes. But Al German, Inuvik's fire chief, said they were too large and heavy to be moved and the effort had to be stopped because flames were shooting out of the doors.

German wouldn't guess what might have caused the fire but he did say the blaze appeared to have started in the building's electrical and generator rooms.

The effort, which also included firefighters from the nearby Canadian Forces base, was strained because of power outages throughout the ordeal. Because phone service was erratic, German said he had difficulty getting several water trucks on site to aid in the effort.

"Once we had the water, we were making progress working toward the middle of the building from both

ends. Then poof we ran out of water, totally helpless feeling."

German said water tanks should be available at the airport for this type of an emergency. If that was the case, he added, planes and the building might have possibly been saved.

"Let's just say there could have been a different outcome."

Crews managed to save two Aklak Airplanes that were sitting just outside the hangar.

James Thorbourne, president of Inuvialuit Development Corporation and Aklak Air, a subsidiary company, said apart from some minor delays, flights were on schedule Friday.

Besides providing passenger service to the five Inuvialuit settlement communities as well as Fort McPherson, the Inuvik based airline brings mail and food mail to those communities as well as cargo to department stores, including Arctic Co-ops Stantons and Northern stores.

Its medical plane that services these areas was in another hangar and unaffected by the fire.

He said apart from a short delay Friday morning, planes were on schedule, flying to Tuktoyaktuk and Fort McPherson at about 10:30 a.m.

He said the airline will get one plane from its partner company



Photo courtesy of Robbie Ise

An early morning fire at the Aklak Air hangar destroyed three planes servicing Beaufort Delta communities.

Kenn Borek Air Ltd. tonight and decide whether more are needed in the coming days.

"Things will carry on as usual," he said. "We will be a little late today. We anticipate that we can handle what we're faced with."

But Thorbourne added he's thankful the fire happened when business is slower.

The company's office, located beside the hangar, was spared in the fire but sustained smoke damage. The office will be temporarily located at the Inuvik Airport. In a few months it will be moved to a trailer across the street from the old location.

Thorbourne estimated each of the planes were worth between \$1

million and \$2 million.

He said everything's insured, but couldn't estimate how much the incident would end up costing the corporation after other expenses, like insurance costs, are calculated.

Thorbourne added he expects the new hangar will be built in about a year in the same location.

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