

Ice cracks force shutdown of UK Antarctic station (Update)

January 16 2017



Penguins are pictured next to a cross that stands as a memorial to three British Antarctic Survey scientists who disappeared in the early 1980s in Petermann Island, Antarctica

A British research station on an ice shelf in Antarctica is being relocated and shut down over the winter because of fears it could float off on an iceberg, the British Antarctic Survey said on Monday.

Sixteen people who were due to stay during the Antarctic winter between March and November will now be moved out, the BAS said in a statement.

The Halley VI station, which is made up of eight brightly-coloured blue and red modules built on stilts with giant skis, was built in 2012.

Seven of the eight modules have been dragged by tractor 23 kilometres (14 miles) inland and off the shelf away from two cracks—one identified in 2012 and the other in October 2016.

"There is no immediate risk to the people currently at the station, or to the station itself," the BAS said.

"However, there is sufficient uncertainty about what could happen to the ice during the coming Antarctic winter for BAS to change its operational plans."

"It is prudent for safety reasons to shut down the station as a precautionary measure and remove its people before the Antarctic winter begins," it said.

The BAS said it could evacuate staff quickly in the summer months but not in winter with its 24-hour darkness, extremely low temperatures and frozen sea.

There are currently 88 people on the station, most of them summer-only staff who were already due to leave.

There have been six Halley research stations on the Brunt Ice Shelf since 1956.

Ozone measurements at Halley led to discovery of the Antarctic Ozone

Hole in 1985 and the station is important for monitoring climate change.

The BAS said "every effort" was being made to continue scientific experiments underway there.

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