

Moscow Cold Kills 2 and Freezes ATMs

December 17, 2009



Steam and exhaust fumes rising from cars as they crawl through the traffic-clogged square at Belorussky Station. **Vladimir Filonov**

Moscow's temperature plunged to a four-year low, killing at least two people, freezing cash machines and pushing electricity consumption to a record.

The "polar cold" reached minus 26 degrees Celsius early Wednesday, said Tatiana Podnyakova, a spokeswoman for the Federal Meteorological Service.

At least two people died of hypothermia and 33 more were hospitalized, according to City Hall data compiled by Interfax.

Sberbank, which holds about half of the country's savings, said 34 of its outdoor automated teller machines were disabled by the cold.

"We are seeing ultrapolar intrusions of air," Podnyakova said. "This is a very major negative anomaly."

The last time that Moscow was so cold was in January 2006, when temperatures dipped below

minus 30 C, and the last time that it was this frigid in December was in 1997, Podnyakova said. Moscow had the warmest December on record last year, with an average of 3.7 C. The coldest was in 1888, when it averaged minus 18.3 C.

Electricity consumption in Moscow and the surrounding region jumped to 17,251 megawatt-hours Wednesday, a second-consecutive record, said Maxim Landa, a spokesman for Moscow Integrated Electricity Distribution Co.

Power use will ebb with the cold snap, Landa said.

Moscow warmed to minus 20 C on Thursday, and temperatures will gradually rise to minus 11 C at the start of next week, the meteorological service said.

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