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Death Toll in Plane Crash Rises to 11

By Andrew McChesney

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Investigators working at the site of the passenger plane crash near Igarka. The crash killed 11 of the 15 people on board, including an 11-year-old girl from Igarka and one crew member, Interfax repor

A passenger plane crashed as it attempted to land in heavy fog in an Arctic port early Tuesday, bursting into a ball of fire that killed 11 of the 15 people on board, emergency officials said.

The An-24 twin turboprop operated by the Katekavia airline came down 700 meters short of the runway in Igarka, a town in the Krasnoyarsk region, as it prepared to land at 1:19 a.m. local time, the local branch of the Emergency Situations Ministry said.

The plane, which was arriving from the regional capital, Krasnoyarsk, burst into flames upon impact, killing 10 passengers, including an 11-year-old girl from Igarka, and one crew member, Interfax reported.

The three-member cockpit crew — pilot Nikolai Kozlov, co-pilot Igor Kabanov and flight engineer Yevgeny Petrunin — survived and were hospitalized in satisfactory condition with bruises and concussions, news reports said.

The sole surviving passenger, Sergei Isakov, was rushed to the hospital with burns covering 80 percent of his body. Local emergency officials said he was in critical but stable condition Tuesday and denied reports that he had died of his injuries, Itar-Tass reported.

The Investigative Committee said it suspected that the crash had been caused by violations of air traffic safety rules — either by the pilots or someone else — and opened a criminal investigation. Investigators have ruled out the possibility that alcohol played a role in the crash, with checks finding that the pilots and the airport manager were sober, the committee said in a statement.

Alcohol was blamed, in part, for the crash of an Aeroflot-Nord plane in Perm in September 2008 that killed all 88 people on board. Alcohol was found in the blood of the pilot of the Boeing 737 jet, which crashed short of the runway while trying to land in heavy fog.

Krasnoyarsk Governor Lev Kuznetsov promised a thorough investigation during a visit to the scene of the Igarka crash on Tuesday.

"I promise that the families of those killed will receive the necessary assistance and the cause of the crash will be established," Kuznetsov said, Itar-Tass reported. "We share your pain and are mourning with you."

He also declared Tuesday a day of mourning for the region, with flags flying at half-mast on government buildings and entertainment programs canceled on local television and radio.

Igarka is a sawmill and timber-exporting port of 8,600 people located about 160 kilometers north of the Arctic Circle. Access to the single-runway airport, which is on an island 3 kilometers out of town, is dependent on ice crossing in the winter or ferry service in the summer.

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