

Looking at How Fires Are Fought in France

By [The Moscow Times](#)

August 05, 2010

The  Moscow Times

The tragic scope of this summer's fires should force the government to think about how to avoid this kind of catastrophe in the future.

Russia has 220,000 firefighters in the Emergency Situations Ministry, which is equipped with about 18,600 pieces of specialized firefighting equipment. There are additional resources at the municipal level, but their exact numbers are anyone's guess.

President Dmitry Medvedev promised to allocate significant funds to boost firefighting equipment and personnel. But even if all of the additional funds reach their intended targets — which in Russia is a rarity — this alone will not solve the problem.

Considering the immense size of Russia and the fact that it has the world's largest forest reserves, it will be difficult to provide fire safety for all the country's forests, as well as the small rural towns and villages that are likely to be completely destroyed in the event of a

nearby forest fire.

When Emergency Situations Minister Sergei Shoigu met with Medvedev earlier this week, he said the administrative bodies that govern dacha villages do not meet basic fire safety standards. Nor are there adequate water supplies to extinguish fires. Medvedev answered Shoigu by saying, “I will give you the order to encourage dacha owners to pay more attention” to better fire safety standards and procedures.

Considering Russian conditions, making the laws and rules stricter and strengthening regulatory bodies at all levels of government will bring few results. The traditional way around these rules is to pay bribes to regulators to avoid the expense and trouble of compliance.

In the West, insurance companies play a crucial role in strengthening fire safety practices among businesses and homes. They demand that those seeking insurance coverage adhere to strict risk management procedures that significantly lower the probability of a fire.

Volunteers can also play a crucial role. In France, for example, there are 179,000 volunteer firefighters for every 40,000 professional firefighters — although in all fairness it should be noted that these “volunteers” receive from 6.80 euros to 10.30 euros (\$9 to \$13.60) an hour if they actively participate in fighting a fire. But far more important than the money they may earn is the sense of responsibility and respect that French volunteers feel for their fellow countrymen.

This comment appeared as an editorial in Vedomosti.

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