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Loggers Sue Khimki Forest Defenders

By The Moscow Times

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Teplotekhnik, the company contracted by the federal government to clear part of Moscow region's Khimki forest for a new highway, has sued environmental activists for a quarter million dollars for blocking its work this summer, Interfax reported Tuesday.

Moscow's Savyolovsky District Court is to consider the lawsuit Thursday.

The company has sued 11 people, including Yevgenia Chirikova, leader of the campaign to protect the forest, claiming 7.99 million rubles ($257,000) in damages for blocking logging equipment from entering the forest.

A lawyer for one of the defendants, Andrei Margulev, said the lawsuit should be thrown out because Teplotekhnik's contract to clear the forest expired in 2009.

Environmental activists were threatened by unidentified thugs and pressured by police to leave as they camped out in the forest in July to prevent the cutting down of the trees.

About 60 hectares of the 144 hectares slated for demolition to make way for the $8 billion highway between Moscow and St. Petersburg were eventually cleared despite public protests.

President Dmitry Medvedev in late August halted the work and ordered public hearings to decide the fate of the road, which protesters say can be built bypassing the forest.

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