

3 Mental Patients Killed in Omsk Fire

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Three people died and another three were hospitalized for smoke inhalation after a fire, apparently caused by a short circuit, broke out in a nursing home for people with mental illnesses in the Omsk region early Wednesday.

A criminal probe was opened on negligence charges, punishable with up to seven years in prison, but no charges have been filed so far, the local branch of the Investigative Committee said in a statement.

The names of the victims were not released, but investigators said the three people who perished in the blaze were female patients aged 44, 55 and 63.

The fire broke out in a facility in the Andreyevsky village at about 1 a.m. and covered about 25 square meters. The five medical attendants on duty managed to lead most of the 150 patients out of the building.

The nursing home's fire alarm system, which regional authorities spent 545,000 rubles

(\$17,000) to repair this year, worked properly, regional authorities said in a statement. Nevertheless, prosecutors started fire safety checks at all nursing homes in the region, they said in a statement.

Russia has a long record of deadly fires at state-run facilities, with most incidents blamed on negligence and violations of fire safety rules.

The deadliest nursing home fire in recent years took place in the Krasnodar region in 2007 and left 62 dead. A night watchman ignored the fire alarm, and firefighters took almost an hour to get to the site because a nearby fire station had been closed.

In a bid to improve the situation, authorities have equipped 99 percent of the country's nursing homes with fire alarm systems, the country's chief fire inspector, Gennady Kirillov, said earlier this month, Interfax reported.

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