

Surgut Plane Crash Kills 3, Hurts 43

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A passenger jet heading to Moscow caught fire as it taxied down a snowy runway in central Russia and then exploded, killing three people and injuring 43 in the Saturday accident, officials said.

The jet, a Tu-154 belonging to the regional Kogalymavia airline, was carrying 124 passengers and crew members out of Surgut.

The accident follows multiple fatal crashes in the past 12 months involving Tu-154s, an aircraft that international carrier Aeroflot removed from its fleet because of technical failures.

On Saturday most of the passengers and crew were evacuated before the plane's explosion, though people on board described a chaotic scene as [the burning plane](#) filled up with thick, black smoke and panicked passengers rushed through flames to escape.

Emergency services spokesman Vadim Grebennikov said [the fire](#), which began in one of the engines as the plane taxied for takeoff, caused a powerful blast that destroyed the aircraft and

spread flames across 1,000 square meters.

Television reports showed video footage taken with a cell phone of the burning plane, its center a giant fireball. All that remained afterward was the tail section and part of a wing.

Grebennikov said 10 people were seriously injured, including six who were badly burned and four who suffered broken bones or other trauma. Most of the other injured passengers sought treatment for poisoning after inhaling toxic fumes.

Among the passengers were members of pop group Na-Na, who described the panic on board the plane.

"First we heard a clap, and then there were flames in the back of the plane and people immediately panicked," group member Yury Rymarev said on NTV. He said flight attendants tried to calm the passengers, but the flames began to spread, especially after one of the passengers opened an emergency exit and air rushed in.

The plane quickly filled up with smoke that was black and acrid from burning plastic, Rymarev said.

Another member of the group, Vladimir Politov, said some people were so desperate to get out that they ran right through the flames, RIA-Novosti reported.

He said all the members of the music group, which was popular in the 1990s, got out through an emergency exit over a wing and that none of them was hurt.

All three engines on the Tu-154 are located in the back of the aircraft. The fire Saturday appeared to have started in the engine mounted over the rear of the plane.

The Tu-154 has been the workhorse of the Soviet and post-Soviet civilian aviation industry since entering service in the 1970s. But after a series of crashes involving the aging fleet raised safety concerns, Aeroflot withdrew all of its Tu-154s from service, with the last flight a year ago.

The midrange jet remains, however, the mainstay of smaller airlines across Russia and the former Soviet Union. It is banned from parts of Europe because of excessive engine noise.

Just last month, two people were killed and 83 injured in an accident involving engine failure on a Tu-154. Two of the engines had failed shortly after takeoff from Moscow's Vnukovo Airport and the third cut out as the plane made an emergency landing near the capital's Domodedovo Airport. The plane then skidded off the snowy runway and broke apart.

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