

Ufa Worker Blamed for Mall Blaze

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Firefighters tackling a blaze that engulfed the three-story Yevropa shopping center in Ufa last Saturday.
Roman Shumnov

A weekend blaze that engulfed a shopping center in Bashkortostan's capital, Ufa, was caused by a construction worker, who was one of the two people killed by the fire, police said Sunday.

Yevgeny Shemgulov, 34, violated safety rules by using a gas-powered heat gun to dry fresh concrete on the shopping center's third floor, causing gas to leak and explode, a police spokesman told Interfax.

Guzel Bulatova, 17, a local high school student, was killed in the resulting fire, which engulfed the Yevropa mall late Saturday. Thirteen people were injured, and eight remained hospitalized Sunday, with one of them, Rustam Gumerov, 27, in serious condition, RIA-Novosti reported.

About 300 people were evacuated from the building.

No precise estimate of the damages was available Sunday, but police said losses ran into the "hundreds of millions of rubles," Interfax reported.

Investigators were looking into the incident.

The mall's firefighting system and fire alarm were not functioning properly, a spokesman for the local branch of Emergency Situations Ministry said Sunday, RIA-Novosti reported.

The mall was fined 10,000 rubles (\$335) for fire safety rules violations in 2007, the spokesman said, adding that a small fire took place in the mall in November but caused no significant damage.

Bashkortostan President Rustem Khamitov ordered money be set aside for families of those killed in Saturday's blaze. The sum was not announced immediately.

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