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Ex-Rosatom Executive Held in $3.9M Inquiry

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A former Rosatom deputy head has been arrested on charges of embezzling 110 million rubles ($3.9 million), the Interior Ministry said Wednesday.

Yevgeny Yevstratov, who was a deputy general director of the sprawling state nuclear energy holding from 2008 until he resigned in April, is accused of pocketing 60 million rubles earmarked for construction projects and another 50 million rubles earmarked for scientific research, the ministry said on its web site.

Yevstratov is the highest Rosatom official to face criminal charges after former Nuclear Power Minister Yevgeny Adamov, who in 2008 was given a suspended prison sentence on charges of stealing millions of dollars in U.S. funds earmarked for bolstering nuclear security in Russia.

The latest case raises new concerns among environmentalists about nuclear safety risks

stemming from endemic corruption in the country's huge nuclear power sector.

The Interior Ministry suggested that Yevstratov had accomplices in the company, saying that in the case of the embezzled research funds, Rosatom employees presented scientific work downloaded from the Internet as their own.

Rosatom reacted by saying it has dismissed 47 senior executives and issued warnings to 220 employees since stepping up its own fight against corruption last year.

To this end, a special "asset protection unit" was set up that works hand in hand with the auditing department, Rosatom said in a statement on its web site.

Rosatom has been embroiled in a string of scandals recently. A former employee who approached The Moscow Times earlier this year claimed that corner-cutting in the construction of nuclear plants was widespread and that a resulting serious nuclear disaster was a real possibility.

In April, prosecutors ordered a re-examination of a case of criminal negligence at the Mayak nuclear processing facility after local media reports warned of risks from counterfeit Chinese piping in the plant's cooling system.

Rosatom has dismissed the assertions as a smear campaign connected to business disputes.

But Greenpeace said Wednesday that systemic corruption and a lack of public control at Rosatom posed a serious risk.

Vladimir Chuprov, who oversees energy projects at Greenpeace Russia, said Rosatom had a "massive potential for corruption" because it was extremely opaque.

"They are a state within the state, a black box," he told The Moscow Times.

He said prosecutors in the Chelyabinsk region confirmed earlier this week that 2 million rubles earmarked for resettling villagers living close to the Mayak plant had been embezzled. Some 4,000 people exposed to radiation in the village of Muslyumovo have been waiting for years to be resettled.

Greenpeace accused Rosatom in a statement Wednesday of abetting the case by funneling the money through a private fund.

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