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Moscow Smog 'Will Not Be Repeated'

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A woman and a stray finding relief wherever possible from this week's heat. **Vladimir Filonov**

The authorities are better prepared to prevent peat-bog smoke from choking Moscow as intensely as last year, when the toxic air combined with record heat to kill dozens of residents, a senior official said Tuesday.

Last year's disaster "will not be repeated," Federal Forestry Agency chief Viktor Maslyakov told journalists.

Scientists have helped the Federal Forestry Agency develop better ways of preventing the peat bogs that surround the capital from burning and smoldering, Maslyakov said, without elaborating.

Acrid smoke wafted in and out of Moscow last July and August as wildfires spread in the forests and bogs surrounding the city, fueled by the hottest weather on record and the worst drought in at least half a century.

President Dmitry Medvedev chastised the government in April for what he called lax preparations for fighting forest fires.

"Given the sad experience we had last year, all this work should have been started last year before the snow fell," Medvedev told a government meeting broadcast on state television on April 27. "If you don't manage it, you will all go to extinguish the peat fires yourselves."

A total of 301 wildfires have occurred in Moscow region, damaging 159 hectares so far this year, which is about three times less than last year, according to data from the Federal Forestry Agency.

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