The Moscow Times
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Plane Accidents Double in 2011

August 23, 2011

The number of plane accidents has doubled compared with last year, and the number of deaths has quadrupled, Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov said Tuesday in a report criticizing small airlines.

Thirteen crashes killing 81 people took place from January to mid-August, Ivanov told a government transportation commission in Moscow.

Another 26 accidents without deaths occurred over the same period, he said.

The statistics did not include the Monday crash-landing of an An-2 biplane that killed one in the Tuva republic and the Saturday crash of a Yak-18T plane near St. Petersburg that left four people dead.

Ivanov did not provide precise comparative figures.

The majority of this year's crashes with fatalities involved obsolete planes, Ivanov said, adding that most of them were owned by small airlines that operate "five or six airplanes, if not less," Interfax reported.

Ivanov reiterated his earlier criticism of the small carriers, saying they were unable to maintain and update their fleets.

Earlier this month, the Transportation Ministry banned long-haul airlines with less than 10 similar aircraft from operation starting January, with the bar to be raised to 20 planes from 2013.

The number of certified airlines has been halved over the past year, Interfax said. The 15 biggest airlines — each with fleets of more than 20 planes — handle 90 percent of all air traffic in the country, it said. But small airlines serve many remote localities.

Original url: https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/08/23/plane-accidents-double-in-2011-a9086