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Cigarette Fire Causes Metro Disruption

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A fire started by a carelessly discarded cigarette brought metro service to a standstill on the green line Wednesday morning, forcing more than 500 people to be evacuated from the Orekhovo station and snarling traffic in southern Moscow, officials said.

No one was hurt, but the small blaze in an equipment room filled the tunnels with smoke and caused service to be shut down between the Orekhovo and Tsaritsyno stations in both directions for nearly 90 minutes, officials said.

"The fire started in a workshop and was contained to an area of just 5 square meters," Emergency Situations Ministry spokesman Yevgeny Bobylev told Interfax.

The fire began around 10:30 a.m. in the room between the two stations — presumably by a careless metro worker — and was quickly put out. Service was fully restored at 12:05 p.m. after the tunnels had been ventilated.

During the disruption Mosgortrans sent in 165 buses to transport passengers around

the affected stations. A flood of emergency vehicles created a dense traffic jam that led taxi drivers to charge more than double the normal rate for rides to metro stations that were open nearby, Interfax reported.

Cab drivers were roundly criticized for similarly jacking up prices in the aftermath of last year's metro bombings and the terrorist attack at Domodedovo airport in January.

The transit nightmare marked the fourth time in a month that metro service has suffered disruptions. The other three episodes were blamed on technical failures.

Meanwhile, transit officials announced that the reopening of the Park Kultury station on the circle line has now been pushed back into next year.

The station, which has been closed since February, was scheduled to reopen in December, but that had to be postponed due to delays in getting certain necessary pieces of equipment in time, RIA-Novosti reported.

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