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Russian Railways Slapped With Small Fine for Serious Gas Leak

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Russian Railways has been slapped with only a minor fine of 250,000 rubles ($8,300) for a serious bromine gas leak that sickened at least 150 people last month in the industrial Urals city of Chelyabinsk.

The Federal Transportation Inspection Service said the fine was the maximum possible liability allowed under the Administrative Code.

Eight railroad employees were also hit with administrative charges, according to a statement posted on the watchdog's web site late Thursday. It did not give their names or elaborate on the charges.

The leak of the chemical — rumored during Soviet times to have been used to suppress the sex drive of soldiers — spread a noxious orange cloud over the city on Sept. 1 after a freight car carrying glass jars of the substance rolled down a rail hump and rammed other cars, officials said.

City officials urged residents to stay inside during the leak, but 150 people were injured — 48 of whom were hospitalized. No reports were available on whether any of them received compensations or sued for damages.

An internal investigation by Russian Railways placed the blame earlier on the cargo's Ukraine-based owner, Brom company, Interfax said. The Russian company said Saturday that it would appeal the fine, Kommersant reported, adding that Brom representatives denied all accusations.

Bromine has numerous industrial uses and has been used by doctors as a sedative, but it can be potentially lethal to anyone exposed to large quantities.

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