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Ecologists to Challenge Kyoto Refusal

By Roland Oliphant

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Environmentalists and business associations have both attacked the government's decision to stay out of the second period of the Kyoto Protocol and promised to challenge the decision in the coming year.

"Russia's refusal to take part in Kyoto 2 was obviously a disappointment this year, and they may have to rethink that decision next year," WWF Russia chief Igor Chestin said at an end-of-year news conference.

Meanwhile, the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, a business association, has separately raised its own concerns about loss of access to lucrative carbon-credit markets.

"Russia has nothing to lose from the second period," Mikhail Yulkin, head of the union's climate change working group told Kommersant on Tuesday. He added that the group intends to challenge the decision.

Russia opposed the extension of the Kyoto Protocol at the Durban climate conference earlier

this month, but acquiesced to an extension on condition that it did not take on any further responsibilities.

Speaking at a joint news conference with representative of Greenpeace and the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry, Chestin said the coming year would also see great emphasis on the Arctic.

The Russian branches of both WWF and Greenpeace have declared 2012 a year of the Arctic.

Foreign ministers of Arctic countries gathered in Greenland in May this year to discuss a legally binding treaty on responses to Arctic emergencies — a "major step forward," in Chestin's words, "because four years ago the same foreign ministers were saying no new treaty was needed."

Environmentalists have vowed to fight development of offshore oil and gas fields in the far north until technology to clean up oil spills under ice becomes available. They pointed to last week's disaster in the Sea of Okhotsk as "another sign that our companies are not ready for work in these conditions."

Dozens of oil workers lost their lives when a platform was overturned in heavy seas while being towed from Kamchatka to Sakhalin on Sunday.

Rinat Gizatulin of the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry pointed to the beginning of a massive cleanup operation on Franz Josef Land as a more positive development this year.

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