

Restaurant Blast Blamed on Gas Canister

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Firefighters trying to put out a stubborn blaze Monday following a deadly gas explosion at a Moscow restaurant. **Tatyana Makeyeva**

Gas canisters were to blame for the deadly fire in a Moscow restaurant that killed two and injured dozens on Monday afternoon, the Emergency Situations Ministry [said](#) in an online statement.

Patrons at the Il Pittore restaurant in the city's southwest were enjoying lunch on the last day of Russia's New Year's vacation when two gas canisters in the kitchen exploded, sparking a fire that engulfed the two-story building, the ministry said Tuesday.

Video footage of the incident, [released](#) by Lifenews.ru, showed dazed and charred survivors stumbling out of the wreckage, including one man whose shirt had been burned away.

A cook and an unidentified young woman died in the blaze, RIA-Novosti reported. City police said 40 people were injured, 28 of them remaining hospitalized as of late Tuesday, including 13 in serious and three in critical condition.

Investigators have opened a criminal case, but pressed no charges so far.

City Hall will donate 1 million rubles (\$31,500) to the families of the two deceased and 500,000 rubles (\$15,750) to dozens injured in the fire, a government spokesman said.

Two looters, both Uzbek nationals, were caught late Monday trying to carry away a stereo system and a payment terminal from the burned building, police said, Interfax reported. Both face up to five years in jail.

The restaurant, which boasts of "surprising, spoiling and charming guests with the tastes of Italy" on its web site, was cited for 11 fire safety violations in January 2011, the ministry said. But in May, the establishment aced a follow-up check, which did not turn up any gas canisters in the building.

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