

Fuel Begins Pumping to Alaskan Town

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A hose from the Russian tanker Renda being pressure tested at the port of Nome, before fuel pumping starts. **Eric J. Chandler**

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Crews began transferring 4.9 million liters of fuel from a Russian fuel tanker to the iced-in western Alaska city of Nome.

The offloading began early Tuesday morning Moscow time, said Stacey Smith of Vitus Marine, the fuel supplier that arranged to have the Russian tanker Renda and its crew deliver the gasoline and diesel fuel.

The process began after crews safety-tested two transfer hoses with pressurized air.

Earlier, crews laid the hoses along a stretch of Bering Sea ice. On Monday, they hooked the hoses to a pipeline that begins on a rock causeway 500 meters from the tanker, which is moored about 800 meters offshore, said Jason Evans, board chairman of the Sitnasuak Native Corp.

Sitnasuak owns the local fuel company, Bonanza Fuel, and has been working closely with Vitus Marine. The pipeline leads to storage tanks in Nome.

The transfer could be finished within 36 hours if everything goes smoothly, but it could take as long as five days.

The Renda got into position Saturday night after a Coast Guard icebreaker cleared a path for it through hundreds of kilometers in a slow journey stalled by thick ice and strong ocean currents. Before the hoses could be laid out, the ice disturbed by the tanker's journey had to freeze again so workers could create some sort of roadway.

Smith said the effort is a third of the way into completion with the arrival of the Renda to Nome. Pumping the fuel from the tanker will be the second part. The third part will be the exiting through ice by the two ships.

"It's just been an absolutely grand collaboration by all parties involved," she said of the work accomplished so far.

The city of 3,500 didn't get its last pre-winter barge fuel delivery because of a massive November storm.

Without the Renda's delivery, Nome would run out of fuel by March or April, long before the next barge delivery is possible after one of the most severe Alaska winters in decades. Snow has piled up 3 meters or higher against the wood-sided buildings in Nome, a former gold rush town that is the final stop on the 1,850-kilometer Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race.

The 113-meter tanker began its journey from Russia in mid-December, picking up diesel fuel in South Korea before heading to Dutch Harbor, Alaska, where it took on unleaded gasoline. It arrived late last week off Nome on Alaska's west coast more than 800 kilometers from Anchorage.

In total, the tanker traveled an estimated 8,000 kilometers, said Rear Admiral Thomas Ostebo, commander of District Seventeen with the U.S. Coast Guard.

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