

Trial Opens for Nightclub Fire That Killed 156

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A video screengrab showing people rushing out of the Khromaya Loshad nightclub in Perm in 2009 to escape the fire.

The first hearing was held Wednesday in the trial of a co-owner of a Perm nightclub where a 2009 fire killed 156 people and injured about 100 others.

Konstantin Mrykhin, co-owner of the Khromaya Loshad, or "Lame Horse," had been hiding in Spain before being arrested and extradited to Russia. He now faces charges of offering services without taking proper safety precautions, and could face up to ten years in prison.

The hearing was a closed session and focused on deciding procedural questions for how the trial is to be carried out, Interfax reported.

The main owner of the nightclub, Anatoly Zak, also had a hearing in the same courthouse Wednesday, but was taken to the hospital after he fell ill in the courtroom. The hearing was rescheduled for Thursday.

The fire occurred on Dec. 5 after a pyrotechnic show ignited the ceiling, which was covered in highly flammable materials in violation of safety codes. Patrons were only able to escape the club through a single exit accessible through a narrow stairway.

Footage of the incident recorded by a club-goer showed the fire begin as sparks flashed behind a decorative wooden panel on the ceiling. People began to push their way toward the exit as the fire spread rapidly across the room. People who made it onto the street could be seen stripping off their burning clothing.

Eight people face various charges for their involvement in the fire.

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