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Trutnev Criticizes TNK-BP Environmental Record

By Howard Amos

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Natural Resources and Environment Minister Yury Trutnev **Denis Grishkin**

In a new round of political pressure, Natural Resources and Environment Minister Yury Trutnev stepped up his attack on TNK-BP on Thursday, ordering legal cases to be brought against the oil company over pollution in western Siberia.

The announcement during a meeting of the government Presidium chaired by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin came the day after Trutnev publicly criticized TNK-BP's environmental record and told the company to draw up a pipeline modernization plan within a month.

After an official visit to the Khanty-Mansiisk autonomous region earlier in the week Trutnev appeared shocked by the scale of the pollution caused by leaking pipes.

"The land is practically flooded with oil," he said after the trip, Gazeta.ru reported. "We didn't have to look for polluted places, we had to look for places that hadn't been touched

by pollution."

In his subsequent discussion with Putin, Trutnev said TNK-BP was responsible for 784 oil spills in the catchment areas of the Ob and the Yenisei rivers every year.

"They have more than enough financial resources to triple investment in pipeline maintenance over the next 5 to 7 years," the minister said.

Trutnev singled out local subsidiary SamotlorNefteGaz, which provides 24 percent of TNK-BP's crude, as one of the worst offenders.

The criticism comes despite a promise by TNK-BP in its 2007 annual report to complete a $1.7 billion pipeline system upgrade by 2012 to reduce leaks. In recent months, the company has sought to highlight the technical sophistication of its operations in Siberia with organized trips for journalists and analysts.

A statement released Wednesday by TNK-BP said all major Russian oil companies worked in the Khanty-Mansiisk autonomous region and noted that pollution in the area had been accumulating since the 1960s.

But Trutnev may not only have had environmental concerns on his mind when attacking Russia's third-largest oil producer. The minister's focus on TNK-BP's record in western Siberia could be part of a campaign to promote his candidacy for the governorship of the region, Kommersant reported Thursday.

Recent media reports have suggested that Trutnev will not be included in the new cabinet named after Putin's inauguration as president in May.

While TNK-BP has been replacing fewer pipelines in recent years, there are "no significant differences between the [environmental records] of major oil companies," Greenpeace director Ivan Blokov said.

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