

Zubkov Warns Governors on Fire Preparation

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Viktor Zubkov **Maxim Stulov**

As fire season approaches and wildfires have already begun inflicting property damage across the country, First Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Zubkov announced that regional heads would be held responsible for inadequate preparation to combat conflagrations.

Zubkov said that governors must inform regional governments by early next week of the measures already taken to assist people who have suffered harm from wildfires.

"If there isn't a sharp improvement and if order is not established, we will raise the appropriate questions with the top people," Zubkov said at a meeting on battling wildfires.

When wildfires brought choking smog into Moscow in August 2010, former Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov triggered a scandal by not cutting short a vacation to return to the city.

Forest service head Viktor Maslyakov said Friday that foresters could be given guns to assist

in their efforts against people starting fires, Interfax reported.

He also said legislation was being drafted to define more clearly the charges that can be brought against those who do not follow fire safety rules and by officials who fail to fulfill their responsibilities for preventing wildfires.

A state of emergency was declared Friday in two districts of Chelyabinsk region due to the burning of two forest fires covering an area of 1,220 hectares, the local forest service said, Interfax reported. The fires grew due to windy conditions and swampy terrain in the area, making it difficult for firefighters to approach them.

On Friday, the Emergency Situations Ministry said that flames had claimed 23 houses in a village in the Amur region, RIA-Novosti reported. No one was injured or killed.

Ten houses in a suburban community in the Khabarovsk region burned down this week, RIA-Novosti reported Friday.

Wildfires could threaten over 12,000 cities, towns and villages in the coming year, an Emergency Situations Ministry forecaster said last week. Wildfires affected 1.67 million hectares of land last year, according to the Emergency Situations Ministry, and 2.45 million in 2010.

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