

Arsonists Behind Animal Shelter Blaze, Investigators Say

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Investigators said Tuesday that a fire that killed seven dogs in a Moscow animal shelter in early November was the work of arsonists.

Experts are continuing to examine the area surrounding the Alma shelter, which was engulfed in flames in the early hours of Nov. 5, but they now treating the case as an arson attack, Sergei Chervyakov, head of the Federal Fire Service, told RIA-Novosti.

Investigators said in preliminary conclusions that the blaze was started by "careless handling of fire by unknown persons," but speculation has swirled that "dog hunters" could have been behind the fire.

Moscow has seen a spate of attacks in the past few months by so-called dog hunters, who conceal poison in food and leave it in public places to kill stray dogs.

Days after the Alma shelter fire, police opened a criminal case on charges of animal cruelty and intentional destruction of property, which carry a maximum sentence of five years in prison.

In comments carried by Interfax, shelter director Lyudmila Bychkova said a witness had seen a man in a green Lada stop outside the shelter in western Moscow and throw something into the compound, after which the building caught fire.

The shelter housed around 200 animals at the time of the incident, but most were saved after staff opened their cages.

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