

Arctic-Mapping Satellite Malfunctions

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A Russian satellite launched last year to map the Arctic has stopped working, a space industry source told the Interfax news agency on Thursday, in the latest disappointment for the country's once-pioneering space program.

The orbiter, Zond-PP, was the first of five Earth-mapping satellites being developed by Russia. Launched last July and weighing 110 kilograms, it was expected to have a three-year life span.

"Zond-PP is declared lost due to a technical malfunction," the source told Interfax, but added that experts were working to try to revive the probe.

The satellite was equipped to monitor ocean salinity levels and land humidity to help Russian meteorologists model ocean currents and ice flows in the Arctic. It was also intended to test imaging systems to detect oil and benzene spills.

According to the source, the Zond-PP was the first in a series of satellites meant to carry out

basic space research. It is not clear whether the latest failure will have any impact on the terms of the launch of the second satellite, the "Relek" small spacecraft. The Relek's launch is set for the end of September, along with a second weather satellite, Meteor-M.

Moscow has boosted space industry spending and said it wants to redirect energy away from manned flight, which makes up nearly half its budget, to focus on pioneering Earth-mapping satellites and deep space exploration.

But the country that sent up the world's first artificial satellite has suffered a series of humiliating failed satellite launches that industry veterans blame on a decade of budget cuts and a brain drain.

Between the end of 2010 and August 2012, Russia's space program suffered at least 10 botched rocket launches.

The most prominent failure occurred in January 2012, when the \$161 million Fobos-Grunt space probe, meant to travel to a moon of Mars, malfunctioned shortly after liftoff and later crashed into the Pacific Ocean.

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