

Sochi Environmental Activist Jailed for 3 Years

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A prominent Russian environmental activist who has reported on the environmental fallout from construction for the \$51 billion 2014 Sochi Winter Games has been sentenced to three years in prison.

Yevgeny Vitishko and another activist were declared guilty of "deliberate destruction of property" and handed a three-year suspended prison sentence in 2012. The other activist, Suren Gazaryan, fled Russia.

The group Vitishko works for, the Environmental Watch on North Caucasus, said a Russian court on Friday upheld prosecutors' demand to turn his suspended sentence into a prison term. He has 10 days to appeal.

Vitishko and Gazaryan had been calling attention to what they said was the local governor's property, located in a national forest where construction is forbidden. Someone in Vitishko and Gazaryan's party who saw the property in 2011 spray-painted "Sanya is a thief" on the fence, referring to Governor Alexander Tkachyov.

Both men were found guilty of "destroying property." They have been fierce critics of the Winter Games, President Vladimir Putin's pet project, and its environmental record. Gazaryan was threatened with another criminal case and was granted political asylum in Estonia earlier this year.

The Associated Press reported this week about activists and journalists who were being harassed in Sochi for their critical coverage of preparations for the Games. They have been detained, slapped with bogus charges, and face heavy police scrutiny.

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