

Sochi Activist Sent to Prison for 3 Years

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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SOCHI — An activist who shed light on the environmental impact of Olympic construction in Sochi was ordered Wednesday to serve three years in prison for spray-painting a fence.

A court in the regional capital of Krasnodar ruled to convert the suspended sentence given to Yevgeny Vitishko in 2012 into a prison term, according to his lawyer, Alexander Popkov.

"We expected it and so did Zhenya," Popkov said, adding that the ruling confirms suspicions that Vitishko is being "persecuted for his activities."

Vitishko and another activist, Suren Gazaryan, were found guilty in 2012 of "deliberate destruction of property" for spray-painting the fence of what they said was a local governor's property in a national forest where construction is forbidden. Both received a suspended sentence, but Gazaryan was later threatened with additional charges and promptly left the country. He received political asylum in Estonia last year.

As a condition for his suspended sentence, Vitishko had to check in regularly with

penitentiary officials and inform them of his travel plans. Officials last year petitioned the court to convert Vitishko's suspended sentence into a prison term, claiming that he had failed to inform him of his trip out of town.

Vitishko was planning to go to Sochi last week to present an environmental report but was arrested in his hometown of Tuapse, 130 kilometers to the northwest, after formally filing for permission to travel to the Olympic city. He was found guilty of swearing at a bus stop, a hooliganism charge.

Popkov said prosecutors cited his Feb. 3 arrest as another argument in favor of his imprisonment.

Rights groups last year said local officials in Krasnodar and Sochi were directly responsible for a campaign of what they described as harassment and intimidation against local activists and journalists. Regional officials have denied any role in persecuting Vitishko and other members of Environmental Watch on the North Caucasus, a key critic of the Games' environmental record.

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