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Watchdog Seeks Charges Against Gazprom Neft Refinery Over Moscow Stench

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An employee walks up the stairs at the Gazprom Neft oil refinery in Moscow.

Russia's environmental watchdog is seeking to bring charges against a Gazprom-owned refinery in Moscow after a powerful smell enveloped the capital earlier this month.

The Rosprirodnadzor agency filed its case in a Moscow city court, accusing the Gazpromneft refinery of releasing "hazardous chemicals into the air," court spokesman Oleg Shassayev said Tuesday, RIA Novosti reported.

If found guilty at a court hearing scheduled for Dec. 4, the refinery's operations could be suspended by up to 90 days, the report said.

The powerful stench felt in several Moscow districts early this month led to warnings from officials that Muscovites should stay indoors and keep their windows shut.

While officials and media reports initially attributed the fumes to an accident at the

Gazpromneft refinery on the city's southern outskirts, the company denied that any such accident took place.

Further adding to the confusion, the Emergency Situations Ministry determined the fumes to be hydrogen sulfide, but the Federal Inspection Service for Natural Resources Use said they were from a different chemical — isopropyl benzene, commonly known as cumene.

A spokesperson for the refinery said that Rosprirodnadzor inspectors found no traces of hydrogen sulfide discharges while conducting tests on its territory, but that it did register elevated levels of isopropyl benzene and another chemical, propanal.

The spokesman added that the company would dispute the inspectors had found traces of isopropyl benzene and propanal as these chemicals are not used on site, Interfax reported.

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