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Russia's Most/Least Eco-Conscious Oil Companies Named in Study

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Russian oil companies average 0.82 kilograms of spilled oil per ton, the study showed.

The first environmental ranking of Russia's domestic oil and gas companies was rolled out Tuesday, and the top scorers say they were surprised by the outcome.

The inaugural "Common Sense" survey of petroleum firms' environmental responsibility was topped by the privately owned Surgutneftegaz, Russia's third largest oil producer.

"We honestly did not see it coming," company representative Andrei Drandusov told The Moscow Times after the study's presentation in the Russian capital, a surprised smile breaking his otherwise stony composure.

The Gazprom-controlled Sakhalin Energy and Gazprom itself rounded out the top three in the study, which ranked 19 Russian oil and gas producers based on standards of environmental responsibility.

Minor domestic producers Belkamneft and Alliance placed within the bottom three of the pool, alongside the Russian subsidiary of the French oil and gas giant Total.

Russia's two biggest oil producers — the state-run Rosneft and privately owned LUKoil — ranked seventh and ninth, respectively.

Russian oil companies average 0.82 kilograms of spilled oil per ton, the study showed.

Given Russia's total output of 523 million tons last year, this puts annual spills at some 430,000 tons, some 10 times less than an estimate by Greenpeace Russia.

In general, transparency appeared to be proportionate to each company's output, though it still leaves much to be desired, the study said: For example, only three of 19 oil producers currently have specific action plans in store for saving animals in case of a spill.

Companies were analyzed based on 29 criteria grouped into three categories: environmental management, environmental impact and transparency.

The survey was based exclusively on publicly available data (for 2013), with oil companies given the chance to disclose lacking information and provide suggestions on methodology. Environmental authorities also contributed.

The survey was commissioned jointly by WWF Russia and energy consultancy Creon and carried out by the private company the National Rating Agency.

Not everyone appeared happy with the study: seventh-place Rosneft boycotted the presentation.

A source at Rosneft said the study is still in its early stages and uses imperfect methodology that does not allow correct comparisons between companies.

But the source, who asked for anonymity because he was not authorized to comment to the press, did not rule out Rosneft participating more closely in upcoming installments of the study.

The study's authors conceded that the methodology was a work in progress: For example, it did not independently verify data provided by the companies.

This was done to avoid putting off the industry, WWF representative Alexei Knizhnikov told The Moscow Times on the sidelines of the event.

He said a more rigorous examination is in store for future installments of the "Common Sense" ranking, in the making since 2004 and meant for annual release.

But environmentalists and oil industry representatives — miraculously — agreed that the study was needed and in fact long overdue.

State environmental standards in the oil industry are too vague, which makes the "Common Sense" study a vital tool for evaluating companies' environmental performance, Knizhnikov said.

A representative for state watchdog the Federal Inspection Service for Natural Resources Use who attended the event did not comment on the criticism, but endorsed the study.

"I want myself and my colleagues to be out of a job," Natalia Sokolova told the room in an unexpected emotional outburst. "I am a mother of three, and I want my kids to live in a clean world."

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