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Giant Sinkhole Still Expanding, Russian Potash Producer Uralkali Says

By The Moscow Times

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The giant sinkhole is growing by a rate of 700 cubic meters per hour, potash giant Uralkali said in a statement Wednesday.

A giant sinkhole that appeared in central Russia's Perm region after a mining accident has continued growing, the world's largest potash producer and owner of the mine, Uralkali, said.

The size of the sinkhole has increased from 30 by 40 meters in mid November to 50 by 80 meters now, the company said Wednesday in an online statement.

The average brine inflow during the same period surpassed 700 cubic meters per hour, the statement said.

Uralkali was forced to suspend operations at its Solikamsk-2 mine in November after high levels of brine inflow were detected, causing a giant sinkhole to form nearby.

In the statement, Uralkali said it was trying to pump out brine that was threatening to flood

additional underground spaces, but quoted a mining research expert as saying the mine is likely to be lost.

"Based on our analysis and the world's experience in developing potassium mines, the risk of a negative scenario — the complete flooding on the mine — remains high," the head of the Ural region's Mining Institute, Alexander Baryakh, was quoted as saying.

"We are ready for this contingency, but we are doing everything possible to minimize related risks," he said, adding that "fortunately, the accident poses no danger to the residents of [the local town of] Solikamsk."

The Solikamsk-2 mine accounts for a fifth of the Uralkali's capacity.

Editor's note: This article has been amended to reflect that the average brine inflow, not the growth rate of the sinkhole, was 700 cubic meters.

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