

Russian Inmates Caught Trying to Keep Cats as Pets

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Prison inspectors have issued an eviction order after spotting several unauthorized feline residents in a penal colony in central Russia.

The cats, whom inmates apparently kept as pets, were discovered during a recent inspection of a prison colony in the central Russian region of Kostroma, the local prosecutor's office said in an online statement Monday.

Inspectors also recorded a number of other regulation breaches during the visit to the Kostroma facility — some 300 kilometers northeast of Moscow — including forbidden personal items stashed under prisoners' beds, unsafe fire escape routes and the absence of soap in washing facilities, according to the statement.

Prosecutors have filed a complaint against the prison's warden, the statement said. There was no word on the future fate of the inmate cats.

Though pets are not allowed behind bars, the authorities have their own ideas about what will cheer up convicts in Russia's infamously harsh prisons.

In an attempt to lighten the load of inmates, the Justice Ministry recently proposed using "irony and jokes" to help the rehabilitation of convicts, according to a recommendation cited by Izvestia daily in December.

While some psychologists welcomed the proposal, at least one prison educator said that jail officials are "not in a joking mood" when dealing with "pedophiles, murderers, rapists, terrorists and Islamists," and said inmates may respond violently to jokes, according to Izvestia.

"Imagine our report," the unidentified official was quoted as saying. "In the last quarter, the educational department joked 150 times, laughed 149 times, and one time inmates did not appreciate the humor and burned the prison down. NB: our joke inventory needs modernization."

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