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Russian TV Reporter Detained for Starting Fire for Report About Wildfires

By Peter Spinella

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Burnt vehicles are seen in the settlement of Shyra, damaged by recent wildfires, in Khakassia region, April 13, 2015.

A reporter for Russian state television network Channel One was detained by police for setting a brush fire to set the scene for his report about devastating wildfires in Siberia, the Kommersant newspaper said Thursday.

Mikhail Akinchenko was filming a report in the southern Khakasia region, which has been ravaged by wildfires in recent weeks. He dropped a cigarette butt into a dry patch of grass, causing a small fire, and later told police that he had done so to shoot the video, local media reported.

The channel apologized in a statement carried by Kommersant: "We admit that an employee of the channel committed an act of carelessness. The participants in this incident will be

punished."

Channel One's deputy head Kirill Kleimyonov told the Russian News Service that the reporter had acted like an "idiot" but would not be fired.

Akinchenko reportedly set the fire in the region's Shirinsky district, where the local fire chief was arrested days earlier for negligence in failing to personally arrange for residents and their property to be saved from a recent spate of wildfires.

The announcement of the fire chief's arrest came shortly after President Vladimir Putin visited the region earlier this week and told the governor that officials should be held accountable for what they had and hadn't done during the fires, which have killed at least 31 people and left about 5,000 people homeless.

The wildfires are believed to have originated as small-scale agricultural grass burning that grew out of control amid abnormally dry conditions.

This isn't the first time that Channel One has caught flak for its reporting.

Last July the station ran a story about a 3-year-old boy being crucified by Ukrainian soldiers in a central square in the eastern Ukrainian town of Slavyansk. The report, which cited a local resident, did not contain photo or video evidence and was widely slammed by political bloggers as made-up anti-Ukrainian propaganda.

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